

**British Domestic Security Policy and Communist Subversion: 1945-1964**

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This thesis is concerned with an analysis of British governmental attitudes and responses to communism in the United Kingdom during the early years of the Cold War, from the election of the Attlee government in July 1945 up until the election of the Wilson government in October 1964. Until recently the topic has been difficult to assess accurately, due to the scarcity of available original source material. However, as a result of multiple declassifications of both Cabinet Office and Security Service files over the past five years it is now possible to analyse the subject in greater depth and detail than had been previously feasible. The work is predominantly concerned with four key areas: firstly, why domestic communism continued to be viewed as a significant threat by successive governments – even despite both the ideology’s relatively limited popular support amongst the general public and Whitehall’s realisation that the Communist Party of Great Britain presented little by way of a direct challenge to British political stability. Secondly, how Whitehall’s understanding of the nature and severity of the threat posed by British communism developed between the late 1940s and early ‘60s, from a problem considered mainly of importance only to civil service security practices to one which directly impacted upon the conduct of educational policy and labour relations. Thirdly, how official counter-subversion methods were formulated and enacted over the period – from remarkably limited beginnings as small-scale vetting reform to a wide-ranging program of surveillance and counter-propaganda by the early 1960s. And finally, whether such responses can be judged as proportional with the benefit of historical hindsight, or if the British government’s conduct should be regarded as an egregious example of reactionary censorship and infringement of civil liberties in the modern era.



For my Family



## **Preface**

*This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.*

*It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.*

*It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the History Faculty Degree Committee.*

*Total word count: 79,561*

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## **Contents**

- **List of Abbreviations Used – 2**
- **Introduction - 4**
- **I – Beginnings: July 1945 – June 1950 - 24**
- **II – Escalation: July 1950 – April 1955 - 60**
- **III – Breakthrough: May 1955 – October 1959 - 98**
- **IV – Loose Ends: November 1959 – October 1964 - 139**
- **Conclusion - 178**
- **Appendix – Suspected Crypto-Communist MPs – 197**
- **Bibliography – 210**

### **Abbreviations Used:**

- **AC (H)** – Cabinet Committee on Communism (Home)
- **AC (M)** – Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Communism
- **AC (O)** – Cabinet Committee on Communism (Overseas)
- **AEU** – Amalgamated Engineering Union
- **AScW** – Association of Scientific Workers
- **AVH** - Államvédelmi Hatóság (Hungarian secret police)
- **BBC** – British Broadcasting Corporation
- **BFI** – British Film Institute
- **CIA** – Central Intelligence Agency
- **CND** – Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
- **Comintern** – Third Communist International
- **CPGB** – Communist Party of Great Britain
- **CPSU** – Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- **DDG** – Deputy Director General of the Security Service
- **DG** – Director General of the Security Service
- **EC** – Communist Party of Great Britain, Executive Committee
- **ETU** – Electrical Trades Union
- **FBI** – Federal Bureau of Investigation
- **FO** – Foreign Office
- **GCHQ** – Government Communications Headquarters
- **GEN 183** – Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities
- **GRU** – Главное Разведывательное Управление/Glavnoye Razvedyvatel'noye Upravleniye (Soviet military intelligence)
- **HO** – Home Office
- **IRD** – Information Research Department
- **IRIS** – Industrial Research and Information Service Limited
- **ITN** – Independent Television News
- **ITV** – Independent Television Company
- **JIC** – Joint Intelligence Committee
- **KGB** - Комитет государственной безопасности/ Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Soviet secret police/civil intelligence agency from 1954)

- **MI5** – Security Service
- **MI6** – Secret Intelligence Service
- **MP** – Member of Parliament
- **NATO** – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
- **NKVD** - Народный комиссариат внутренних дел/Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del (Soviet secret police/civil intelligence agency 1934-1946)
- **NUM** – National Union of Mineworkers
- **PLP** – Parliamentary Labour Party
- **PM** – Prime Minister
- **PUS** – Permanent Under Secretary
- **RIS** – Russian Intelligence Services
- **SIS** – Secret Intelligence Service
- **TASS** – Телеграфное агентство Советского Союза/ Telegrafnoye Agyentstvo Sovyetskovo Soyuz (Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union)
- **TUC** – Trades Union Congress
- **UNESCO** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- **USAF** – United States Air Force
- **USDAW** – Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers
- **WFSW** – World Federation of Scientific Workers

## **Introduction**

During the early years of the Cold War, the problem of communist subversion was a subject of particular importance for British domestic security policy. Despite being consistently limited both in terms of relative numerical size and political influence, the communist movement was regarded by the British government as the central threat to the domestic stability of the United Kingdom for the better part of twenty years. Owing to the, at best, loose official definition of subversion, counter-measures designed to combat domestic communism were wide ranging, and directly impacted upon a wide swathe of British civil society. Despite the resources invested, anti-communist measures experienced only mixed success however, and from the evidence available it seems clear that British communism's decline was caused as much by the movement's own structural weaknesses as it was by official efforts to undermine it. Uneven results prolonged official attention, whilst concern was perpetuated still further by shifting official understandings of the communist movement and the manner of the threat it posed to British stability and security. Though communist subversion initially provoked concern primarily due to fears related to Soviet espionage, as the Cold War progressed, successive governments became more interested in the communist movement's broader ideological appeal as well as influence within the trade union movement. Altered understanding served to keep communism at the heart of domestic security concerns – as successive problems were resolved during the nineteen year period, other facets of the issue were identified, ensuring that official focus was maintained long past the point where the threat of communism, as understood during the late 1940s, had been mitigated.

### **Defining 'Subversion'**

The concept of 'subversion', as understood by the British government during the early Cold War period was broad and relatively nebulous. Importantly, throughout the entirety of the period covered by this thesis 'subversion' as a concept was never formally defined by either ministers or the intelligence services. Indeed, the Security Service actively refrained from creating a strict definition until 1972, when John Jones (then Director of F Division, counter-subversion) finally defined the term as: 'activities threatening the safety or well-being of the State and intended to undermine or overthrow Parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means' (A definition which was subsequently accepted by the wider government, as proved by its quotation in both the House of

Commons and House of Lords in 1978 and 1975 respectively).<sup>1</sup> In the absence of a formalised definition, ‘subversion’ appears to have been something of a catch-all term, understood perhaps less as a fixed concept than a term to describe those activities which did not fit neatly into the more tangible categories of espionage and sabotage. Subversive movements were defined broadly as those ‘which might threaten the security of the State’<sup>2</sup>, though the exact nature of this threat was left ambiguous. ‘Subversion’ was therefore an open-ended term, which was used by the British government to describe a multitude of political and economic threats which were unable to be classified as formal espionage or sabotage.

This being said, though subversion and espionage were understood to be separate phenomena, it is also clear that ministers and the intelligence services believed the two concepts to be inherently linked. As stated by Norman Brook (Cabinet Secretary 1946-1964) in his 1951 review of Britain’s intelligence apparatus:

‘It is the first duty of a Security Service to counter subversive activities by Communists... This study of the British Communist Party makes a direct contribution to the work of counter-espionage... Study of British Communism and its adherents covers the field in which clues are most likely to be found to the identity of agents working for the intelligence services of Russia and her satellites.’<sup>3</sup>

For reasons which shall be discussed in chapters one and two, communist subversion, at least until the early 1960s, was viewed as the mechanism via which Soviet espionage was facilitated. As such, to fully appreciate the concerns guiding the development of counter-subversive policy, some examination of espionage is also required.

Meanwhile, it follows that as ‘subversion’ was never accorded a strict definition, the concept of the individual ‘subversive’ remained equally nebulous. In the absence of either a fixed legal or semantic definition, the notion of what exactly constituted ‘subversive’ traits was left wholly for the government to dictate. Categorisation of an individual as a ‘subversive’ therefore essentially occurred at the discretion of the Security Service officer, Civil Servant or minister who happened to be commenting upon a particular report.

This thesis therefore assumes two key points. The first: that that ‘subversion’ was not a fixed concept, but was rather a nebulous ‘catch-all’ phrase, used to denote activities

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), p. 591

<sup>2</sup> Report of Enquiry by Sir Norman Brook into the Secret Intelligence and Security Services, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

which the government believed to be antithetical to domestic security and stability, yet were unable to be classified under more fixed terminology such as ‘espionage’ or ‘sabotage’. As such, ‘subversive’ was a description able to be used unilaterally by officials almost at whim. An individual or group was ‘subversive’ simply because the government said so. The second: that despite official categorisation of ‘subversion’ as an independent concept, due to frequent overlap between counter-subversion and counter-espionage policy (particularly during the period from 1945-1955) adequate understanding of the development of counter-subversive measures cannot be obtained without reference to counter-espionage concerns.

### **Historical Background**

The roots of Whitehall’s post-war campaign of counter-subversion can be found in the inter-war period. From the founding of the Third Communist International (Comintern) in March 1919, the domestic communist movement was regarded as a potential source of subversion by successive governments. In particular, the Communist Party of Great Britain was consistently viewed as a body under the thrall of the USSR and therefore susceptible to exploitation as a tool of hostile Soviet foreign policy. Such a view of the Party was justifiable, as the CPGB was fundamentally tied to Soviet policy from its very beginnings in 1920. Though the history of British communism can be traced back to the very genesis of the political philosophy – the first Marxist political party, the Communist League, was founded in London in 1847 and it was on their behalf that Marx and Engels penned the world-changing tract *The Communist Manifesto* in early 1848 – it was not until 1920 that Britain possessed a nationally-organised communist party.<sup>4</sup> British communism prior to 1920 was represented by a series of disparate Marxist groups of varying size and influence, for example the British Socialist Party founded in 1911 and Socialist Labour Party founded in 1903, which rather than being avowedly communist tended to oscillate position between supporting socialism via parliamentary democracy as advocated by the nascent Labour Party and advocating the necessity of full proletarian revolution.<sup>5</sup> Such a state of affairs changed with the founding of the Comintern in March

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<sup>4</sup> Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, (HarperCollins, London, 1997), p. 33

<sup>5</sup> Which inevitably lead to fragmentation. A portion of the BSP, under Henry Hyndman was subsumed by the Labour Party, the other half was instrumental in the founding of the CPGB. James Kluggman, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol. I*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968), p. 17



1919 by Vladimir Lenin. The organisation aimed to create an international network of explicitly communist political parties, united in their desire for the ‘overthrow of the international bourgeoisie’, with policy directed centrally by Moscow.<sup>6</sup> Following attendance at the 1<sup>st</sup> Congress of the Comintern, held in Moscow in March 1919 the majority of British Marxist groups amalgamated to form the Communist Party (British Section of the Third International) and Scottish-based Communist Labour Party in June and September 1920 respectively. These groups then amalgamated again in January 1921 to form the Communist Party of Great Britain.

The Communist Party of Great Britain was therefore fundamentally tied to the Soviet Union from the outset. The Party’s very founding was a product of Soviet policy and its political position was consistently supportive of the prevailing line taken by the CPSU. From the government’s perspective the Communist Party represented a subversive movement which would seek to extend its influence wherever possible and seek to undermine the foundations of the British state. The Comintern itself had proclaimed its subversive nature openly via the ‘twenty-one conditions’ which were announced as prerequisites for membership at its Second Congress, held in the summer of 1920:

‘The obligation to spread Communist ideas includes the persistent necessity of persistent, systematic propaganda in the army. Wherever such propaganda is forbidden by exceptional laws, it must be carried on illegally. The abandonment of such work would be equivalent to the betrayal of revolutionary duty and is incompatible with membership in the Third International.’<sup>7</sup>

Given that the CPGB voluntarily signed up to the full twenty-one conditions as a condition of its membership of the Comintern, official concern regarding the Party is understandable. Responsibility for opposing such activity fell principally to two departments, MI5 and police Special Branch. Importantly, due to its initial conception as a military intelligence organisation, MI5 at this early stage held responsibility only for countering communist activity within the Armed Forces. All communist-related investigations within civilian society remained the sole preserve of Special Branch. This being said, it was the military aspect of the communist subversive threat which most worried the governments of David Lloyd George, Andrew Bonar-Law and Stanley Baldwin and thus MI5 assumed a central counter-communist role during the early 1920s despite its theoretically limited remit. In 1920 and 1921 alone, the Service investigated

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Service, *Comrades: Communism: A World History*, (Macmillan, London, 2007), pp. 107-108

<sup>7</sup> O. Piatnitskiy, *The Twenty-One Conditions of Admission Into the Communist International*, 1934, p. 29, accessed via: <http://digital.library.pitt.edu/u/ulsmanuscripts/pdf/31735061539171.pdf>

circa ninety-five cases of 'suspected communism', whilst cultivating a watch-list of suspected 'persons potentially dangerous to national defence' to 25,250 names by 1925.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, between the First and Second World Wars, more Security Service resources were devoted to the investigation and surveillance of CPGB related targets than any other matter.<sup>9</sup>

Curiously, and in direct contrast to later Labour administrations, the first Labour government under Ramsay MacDonald exhibited little interest in subversive threats. Indeed, MacDonald was wholly dismissive – appearing to regard subversion as something of a joke - when approached on the matter by Sir Wyndham Childs (head of Special Branch) two days after assuming office in 1924:

'It might be made at once attractive and indeed entertaining if its survey were extended to cover not only communistic activities but also other political activities of an extreme tendency. For instance a little knowledge in regard to the Fascist movement in this country... or possibly some information as to the source of the 'Morning Post' funds might give an exhilarating flavour to the document and by enlarging its scope convert it into a complete and finished work of art.'<sup>10</sup>

Arguably, such a high-handed approach by MacDonald later proved highly politically damaging as a result of the Zinoviev letter affair, a scandal which circulated around a letter published in the *Daily Mail* mere days before the October 1924 General Election. The document, later proved to be a forgery,<sup>11</sup> was purported to have been sent from the Moscow headquarters of the Comintern to the Communist Party of Great Britain and made a number of damaging claims against the Labour Party. Chiefly that Labour would restore full diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and thus as a result hasten the progress of Britain's workers to militant class consciousness and revolution.<sup>12</sup> Such charges appeared to confirm right-wing suspicions that Labour was 'soft' on Bolshevism,<sup>13</sup> and Labour went on to lose the election. The Conservative Party won a landslide victory, with a net gain of 154 seats, a turn of events some within the Labour party blamed directly on the letter, whilst believing members of British intelligence to be

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<sup>8</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 142-143

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 142

<sup>10</sup> Ramsay MacDonald to Sir Wyndham Childs, 24<sup>th</sup> January 1924, p. cit. Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community*, (William Heinemann, London, 1985), p. 299

<sup>11</sup> Richard J. Aldrich & Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence & British Prime Ministers*, (William Collins, London, 2016), p. 49

<sup>12</sup> Sibyl Crowe, 'The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (July, 1975), p. 407

<sup>13</sup> Aldrich & Cormac, *The Black Door*, pp. 48-49

the root cause of its publication.<sup>14</sup> The importance of ensuring that public perceptions of the Labor Party were not tainted by association with communism was thus learned the hard way by PLP leadership.

Damagingly, subversive concerns became increasingly politicised under the second Baldwin government. In May 1927 Baldwin hastily authorised a raid on the All-Russian Co-operative Society (ARCOS, the organisation which orchestrated Anglo-Russian trade) in the hope of securing proof that the group was acting as a front organisation for Soviet Intelligence.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the Baldwin government came under considerable pressure from Conservative MPs – including Winston Churchill – to sever diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Keen to justify such a move as grounded in security, rather than political, concerns, Baldwin turned to the material obtained in the ARCOS raid in the hope of finding useable evidence of Soviet espionage. Unfortunately the raid, hastily planned and poorly executed, had failed to uncover any such ‘smoking gun’. In desperation, Baldwin took the unprecedented step of quoting from intercepted Soviet telegrams in the House of Commons which had been decrypted by the Government Communications and Cypher School (forerunner to GCHQ). As stated by Christopher Andrew: ‘the debate... developed into an orgy of governmental indiscretion about secret intelligence for which there is not parallel in modern history’.<sup>16</sup> As a direct result, realising that its communications were vulnerable, the Soviet government switched to the ‘one-time pad’ system of encryption – a decision which consequently left British intelligence unable to decrypt the vast majority of high-level Soviet messages until the end of the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> The only silver lining was that the debacle proved a valuable learning experience for Churchill. Despite the prevalence of subversive concerns during his second tenure as Prime Minister, Churchill refused to succumb to the temptation of using secret intelligence as formal justification for official counter-measures.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, so damaging was Baldwin’s misuse of signals intelligence, that even during the 1970s new Cabinet Ministers were still informed of the story, as an example of how the use of secret material for short-term political gain could have very long-term negative consequences.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Andrew Williams, *Labour and Russia: The Attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR, 1924-1934*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989), p.18

<sup>15</sup> Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door*, pp. 54-56

<sup>16</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 155

<sup>17</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 156

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Two.

<sup>19</sup> Aldrich and Cormac, *The Black Door*, p. 58

Meanwhile, during the later 1920s the system which had prevailed since 1909 – under which the Security Service had remit over security matters related only to the Armed Forces, whilst Special Branch handled civil affairs – was slowly recognised as counterproductive and somewhat antiquated. As was belatedly recognised by the Service, such a system was inherently disjointed and wholly unsuited for tackling subversive activity:

‘A Communist, working in naval or military circles at Portsmouth or Aldershot, may spend his Sundays making revolutionary speeches in Hyde Park. The former of these occupations is a matter for research by MI5; his week-end relaxations bring him into the preserve of the Special Branch.’<sup>20</sup>

Such an impractical arrangement could not have lasted for any great length of time. Therefore, in many ways it was the investigation of communist subversives during the 1920s which spurred the transformation of the Service from a small military intelligence unit to the main domestic security agency of the British state. The awkward delineation of responsibility between MI5 and Special Branch necessitated a considerable degree of what in modern parlance might be termed ‘mission creep’ with regards to the Service’s counter-communist activities. As it was the civilian communist movement which was attempting to subvert the armed forces, MI5’s responsibility for military counter-subversion meant, by the Service’s interpretation, that it had to expand its surveillance activities to encompass civilian targets (much to the irritation of Special Branch).<sup>21</sup> Jostling for position between the two branches on matters of counter-subversion continued until 1928 and the discovery by MI5 that Special Branch officers had been bribed by a Soviet espionage ring to provide regular updates on the status of surveillance targets. The ring, which utilised journalism as a cover for its activities and was led by the pro-Soviet foreign editor of the *Daily Herald* William Norman Ewer, had purchased the services of Inspector Ginhoven and Sergeant Jane of Metropolitan Police Special Branch in order to procure weekly updates regarding individuals who were the subject of Home Office surveillance warrants or who were listed to be questioned on arrival at British ports. The information was then passed on by Ewer and his associates to Soviet intelligence, to whom it was of clear use in the running of agent operations. As a result of Ginhoven and Jane’s indiscretions, MI5 concluded that ‘any information regarding subversive organisations and individuals supplied to Scotland Yard by SIS or MI5, which had become the subject of Special Branch enquiry, would have to be regarded as having

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<sup>20</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 141

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 142-143

been betrayed to Ewer's group'.<sup>22</sup> Though Ewer, Ginhoven and Jane all escaped prosecution owing to political concerns,<sup>23</sup> the episode was greatly influential in securing the transfer of all domestic counter-subversive responsibilities to MI5 – where they have remained until the present day.

Counter-subversion measures remained predominantly focused on the Armed Forces and defence industry during the 1930s. A series of serious dockyard sabotages between 1933 and 1936 in particular served to keep the issue at the forefront of the Service's concerns. Meanwhile, by the late '30s MI5 had established a relatively pervasive system of surveillance, comprised both of agents within the CPGB itself as well as a highly effective signals intelligence program (co-run with the Government Code and Cypher School) known as operation MASK, which successfully intercepted the vast majority of telecommunication traffic between the Comintern and CPGB.<sup>24</sup> Said surveillance network provided intelligence which indicated that the Comintern was instructing the CPGB to moderate its civil propaganda efforts as part of its broader anti-fascist 'Popular Front' strategy, therefore seemingly reducing the need for the monitoring of subversion within civil society. A defence-oriented focus again seemed to be vindicated following the discovery of a Soviet spy ring operating inside of the Woolwich Arsenal in January 1938.<sup>25</sup> Though the discovery of the spy ring was undoubtedly a blow to Soviet intelligence operations, unfortunately due to lack of resources (MI5 was composed of a mere 26 officers in 1938)<sup>26</sup> the Service proved incapable of following up many of the leads gained from the case. Had they done so, it seems likely that MI5 would have discovered the far larger NKVD recruitment network in operation in Britain during the 1930s.<sup>27</sup> As it was, the discovery of the Woolwich Arsenal ring proved something of a pyrrhic victory. Though it disrupted Soviet intelligence gathering regarding British armament manufacture, the success of the case helped convince Vernon Kell (head of the Service since 1909) that 'Soviet activity in England is non-existent, in terms of both intelligence and political subversion'.<sup>28</sup> Due to this complacency, the vast majority of

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<sup>22</sup> Serial 809a, 8<sup>th</sup> January 1930, TNA, KV 2/1016

<sup>23</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 158-159

<sup>24</sup> See Nigel West, *MASK: MI5's Penetration of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, (Routledge, London, 2005)

<sup>25</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 179-182

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182

<sup>27</sup> Crucially, Arnold Deutsch, recruiter of the Cambridge Five, remained undiscovered

<sup>28</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 185

Soviet operations remained undiscovered and waiting to wreak havoc on official confidence come the 1950s.

With the outbreak of war on 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1939, security priorities shifted overwhelmingly towards Britain's conflict with Nazi Germany. The CPGB did, however, remain an object of interest during the early years of the war, due largely to the Party's continued support for the Soviet Union despite the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1939.<sup>29</sup> Importantly, the continuation of concern led to the installation of eavesdropping devices within the CPGB's London headquarters, an action which was to prove hugely beneficial to the Service's post-war counter-subversion efforts.<sup>30</sup> The signing of the 1942 British-Soviet treaty and subsequent political rehabilitation efforts by the CPGB made the Service's attempts to maintain accurate records regarding the Party's activities futile however. As CPGB membership expanded to some 56'000 members by 1945,<sup>31</sup> attempts to maintain current records were discontinued. Though certain elements of the Security Service remained wary of CPGB activity – most notably F (counter-subversion) division under Roger Hollis – countering communist subversion was relegated to a distinctly peripheral concern.

The progress of events during the inter-war period therefore established many of the conditions which would come to shape the development of domestic counter-subversion policy during the early Cold War period. The nature of the Communist Party of Great Britain's founding as essentially a tool of Soviet foreign policy ensured that from the outset the Party was viewed with concern by successive British governments. Meanwhile, governmental focus upon subversion in the Armed Forces, coupled with security failings within Special Branch served to steadily elevate the Security Service to a position of central responsibility over counter-subversive investigation and practice by the end of the 1920s. However, though some disruption of communist activity was achieved during the inter-war period, most notably the Ewer and Woolwich Arsenal spy rings, the Security Service failed to detect the most damaging of the Soviet Union's long-term espionage plots, namely the recruitment of well-placed British communist sympathisers who would go on to achieve employment within sensitive positions throughout Whitehall. Moreover,

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<sup>29</sup> Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism*, p. 85

<sup>30</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 274-275

<sup>31</sup> Though this figure had declined to around 42,000 by April 1945. Andrew Thorpe, 'The Membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain, 1920-1946', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 3, September 2000, p. 781

as a result of short-sighted attempts to exploit subversive concerns for political gain, the Baldwin government succeeded in destroying British intelligence's capacity to read high-level Soviet communications for the best part of twenty years. Though a certain amount of counter-subversive experience was gained over the period 1919 to 1945, this was to large degree offset by successive failures to accurately assess the nature of the communist threat and to keep information current. As it was, Britain emerged from the Second World War with only limited knowledge of domestic communism and a misplaced sense of confidence regarding official ability to contain the threat. Though British intelligence believed that it had the problem under control as of August 1945, it was shortly to be firmly disabused of this notion.

### **Literature Review**

Despite the importance of domestic counter-subversion policy to understanding the wider history of British involvement in the Cold War, the topic has remained relatively understudied, predominantly due to a lack of available primary source material. However, due to multiple recent declassifications of archival material by the Cabinet Office, Security Service and Foreign Office, it is now possible to thoroughly examine the development of British domestic counter-subversive policy and assess its efficacy. Whilst it has been possible in the past to study certain elements of domestic counter-communist policy, it is only within the last four years that a full survey of its development, from escalation under the Attlee government to the eventual reduction of concern under Macmillan, has been academically feasible. Understandably, due to said lack of publically available source material, wider scholarship regarding the development of British domestic counter-subversion policy in the early Cold War era is extremely limited. The doctoral thesis of Christian Schlaepfer, *Counter-Subversion in Britain, circa 1945-62*, arguably constitutes the most significant prior examination of the topic. Submitted in 2012, Schlaepfer's thesis provided a solid analysis of how links between the Labour Party and British trade unionism helped to isolate communist influence during the immediate post-war period. At the time of Schlaepfer's submission however, the vast majority of archival material related specifically to the formulation of counter-subversive policy was yet to be publically released. *Counter-Subversion in Britain* provides therefore only marginal comment on policy development, and contains little substantive analysis of

events post-1955. The publication of Thomas J. Maguire's article 'Counter-Subversion in Early Cold War Britain: The Official Committee on Communism (Home), the Information Research Department, and "State-Private" Networks', in *Intelligence and National Security* in 2015, rectified this gap in the historiography somewhat. However, again, Maguire wrote his piece at a point where only a small subset of the relevant archival materials had been made publically available.<sup>32</sup> The piece provides a useful overview of policy development during the years of the Attlee government, however, provides little by way of assessment post-1951.

Beyond Schlaepfer and Maguire's respective pieces, there has been extremely little written specifically on the subject of early Cold War counter-subversion policy. Discussion of the subject does appear in other secondary sources, however is typically addressed only either tangentially or as a chapter within a larger piece. Of such works, Professor Christopher Andrew's official history of MI5, *The Defence of the Realm*, published in 2009, is arguably the most notable. The book represents the most comprehensive history of the Service yet published and has been of tremendous value during the course of research for this thesis. Discussion of counter-subversion practice does occur within Andrew's work, however this is related primarily to Security Service operations, rather than to development of policy. Meanwhile, given that much of the material *Defence of the Realm* examined has still not yet been formally released into the public domain, the work is difficult to independently verify. This being said, those files which have been declassified since *DOR*'s publication have corresponded to Andrew's conclusions – indicating that *Defence of the Realm* can be relied upon as an accurate source. Beyond Andrew, significant discussion of facets of counter-subversive policy appeared within Peter Hennessy's revised 2010 edition of *The Secret State*. *The Secret State* provided a fairly comprehensive examination of vetting reform under the Attlee government, and the role of subversives in transition to war planning during the late 1960s, however did not provide a study of how these subjects related to the development of counter-subversive policy over time.

With regards to the contributions of the Information Research Department (IRD), again, relatively little has been written specifically on the organisation's contributions to domestic policy formulation. Most prior work has been focused heavily on IRD's

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<sup>32</sup> Files regarding the AC (H) were released in two batches over the course of 2014



overseas output. There are two notable exceptions to this, namely Hugh Wilford's *The CIA, The British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* and John Jenks 2006 monograph, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War*. Prior to the publication of Schlaepfer's PhD, Wilford's work represented the sole major analysis of British domestic counter-subversion practices, albeit via an American lens. Wilford's work is useful as a preliminary overview of IRD's domestic activities, however the book was published in 2003 and thus is slightly out of date given the enormous amount of material on this subject which has been declassified since that point. Jenks' work meanwhile examined the subject of British Cold War propaganda from the viewpoint of the journalistic profession. Whilst Jenks was unable to comment substantively on domestic propaganda from a policy perspective, due to the lack of source material available in 2006, his work is extremely valuable for the way in which it demonstrated how the professional relationships between IRD and the British Press developed and functioned on a day to day level. Beyond Wilford and Jenks, Andrew Defty's 2013 book, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53* arguably constitutes the most complete overview of IRD's early work thus far, however it is overwhelmingly focused upon the Department's foreign output and as such has been of limited immediate benefit to this thesis. Similarly, Linda Risso's 2011 article for *Intelligence and National Security* entitled 'A Difficult Compromise: British and American Plans for a Common Anti-Communist Propaganda Response in Western Europe, 1948-58' concerns itself with IRD's contribution to counter-propaganda efforts on the continent and contains no mention of its domestic role.

Discussion of counter-subversive policy is also notably lacking within the various Prime Ministerial biographies which have been consulted over the course of this thesis. Indeed, most biographies regarding Clement Attlee scarcely mention the intelligence aspect of his premiership at all. Nicklaus Thomas-Symonds 2012 book, *Attlee: A Life in Politics* made scarcely any mention of Attlee's close relationship with the Security Service, whilst meanwhile Kenneth Harris' classic biography, *Attlee* again passed little comment on the PM's relationship with the secret state. Even John Bew's 2016 biography of Attlee, *Citizen Clem*, includes no mention of the Prime Minister's concerns regarding subversion. Michael Jago's 2014 biography *Clement Attlee: The Inevitable Prime Minister* does somewhat better in this regard and does devote a chapter to the subject. However, many of his conclusions appear to have been predicated on the commentary of Chapman

Pincher, who can scarcely be described as a reliable narrator. Churchill fares slightly better, essentially due to his established reputation as a voracious consumer of secret intelligence.<sup>33</sup> Again however, post-war domestic counter-subversion policy has received little explicit attention within the vast majority of Churchill-related literature. The topic appeared on the periphery of David Stafford's 1997 book, *Churchill and Secret Service*, though Gill Bennet's 2007 biography of Desmond Morton, *Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence* is more useful in this regard due to Morton's brief liaison with IRD in the early 1950s. Unsurprisingly most of the previous literature regarding Eden has been focused heavily on Suez, with an examination of the PM's attitude to domestic security rather overshadowed by the 1956 debacle. Richard Aldrich and Rory Cormac's 2016 book on the relationship between Prime Ministers and secret intelligence, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers*, has corrected this oversight somewhat, even if its analysis of the topic was (understandably) brief due the work's broader intention as a survey of multiple Prime Ministerial careers. Equally, whilst biographies of Harold Macmillan have typically featured considerable discussion of the intelligence aspect of his premiership, such analysis has tended to be limited to those espionage scandals which, in large part, helped to undermine his government - rather than dwelling on Macmillan's attitude to domestic communism. D.R. Thorpe's 2010 book *Supermac: The Life of Harold Macmillan*, falls into this category as does Alistair Horne's official biography of the PM, published in two parts over 1988 and 1989.

It can be seen therefore that there is a clear gap in the current historiography which this thesis is well placed to fill. Owing predominantly to a lack of available source material, the development of counter-subversive policy has received very little assessment in previous historical works. What little analysis has been attempted, has typically focused on specific events, facets, or concentrated periods, and there has been no attempt to assess these various elements as a whole in order to understand the underlying factors which shaped Whitehall's response to domestic communism. This thesis seeks to make an original contribution to historical knowledge by assessing the development of British security policy in relation to domestic communism over the course of the nineteen year period which the matter was of greatest concern. The manner by which counter-subversive policy was formulated and enacted has had tremendous implications for both

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<sup>33</sup> Richard J. Aldrich & Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers*, (William Collins, London, 2016), p. 162

the British political system and social structure. Concerns regarding communism fundamentally altered the nature of the British State's relationship to its citizenry, and it is of the utmost historical importance that the reasons why and how this shift occurred be explored.

### **Methodology**

The vast majority of this thesis' argument is predicated on original archival research. Unsurprisingly, given the fact that this work is primarily concerned with the development of British governmental policy, most archival material has been drawn from the National Archives at Kew. Though the files of various departments have been consulted, it is the Cabinet Office, Security Service and Prime Ministerial (CAB, KV and PREM) series which have been of most relevance. Of particular importance to this thesis is the CAB 134 series, which contains the full files of the Cabinet Committee on Communism (Home). Founded in 1951 under then Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook, the AC (H) was the central governmental body for the deliberation of domestic counter-subversive policy between 1951 and 1962. It is only since mid-2013 however that the files of the Committee have been declassified and transferred to the National Archives at Kew.<sup>34</sup> The files contain not only the Committee's minutes, but also regular briefing reports from IRD and the Security Service regarding both overt and covert communist activity within the United Kingdom. Certain of the reports circulated to the AC (H) are still withheld from public view – most notably a 1952 IRD progress report, 1960 Security Service investigation into communism in the British Film Institute and briefings of the 1963 AC (H) Working Party – however these examples are very much the exception, the vast majority of AC (H) deliberations have now been released for public examination. Totalling some 300 individual papers in total,<sup>35</sup> the files of the AC (H) provide a record of the key decisions and analyses which contributed to the development of domestic counter-subversion policy during the early Cold War. The lack of the CAB 134 series public availability until relatively recently has prevented any analysis of the development of British counter-subversive policy making in the post-war period. This thesis represents the first time that they have been assessed in their entirety, rectifying this previous

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<sup>34</sup> The first batch of AC (H) files were released in late 2012, however it was not until summer 2013 that the declassification process was completed. File CAB 21/5004 was available as early as 2005, though this is a rather slim volume comprised solely of the Committee's terms of reference and a small amount of general correspondence.

<sup>35</sup> TNA estimate. See: <http://origin.nationalarchives.gov.uk/news/775.htm>

historiographical gap. The release of the Brook Report of Inquiry in 2014 has been equally vital to this work. The document represents a wholesale review of British intelligence as it existed in 1951, and challenges existing thinking by demonstrating the centrality of counter-subversion to MI5's priorities. Beyond the files of the AC (H), this thesis makes extensive use of the personal diaries of Guy Liddell dating from the post-war era. Liddell served as Deputy Director General of MI5 between the years of 1945-1953, keeping a personal daily diary throughout the period which was later deposited with MI5 following his death in 1958.<sup>36</sup> Given the level of detail and meticulousness with which Liddell recorded his thoughts, his diaries make for a unique and highly valuable record of the personal relationships and immediate concerns which served to inform high-level security policy-making during the Attlee and Churchill governments. Whilst Liddell's war-time diaries were publically released in 2002,<sup>37</sup> his post-war records were only declassified in October 2012 meaning that they have received relatively little attention at the time of writing. Liddell's testimony helps to illuminate the scale of Attlee's personal involvement in intelligence-related decision making – challenging the writings of Bew, Harris and Thomas-Symonds, all of whom omit this crucial element in their various biographies.

This thesis has also profited from the release of several Security Service 'personal files' over the past three years, most notably those of individuals associated with the Communist Party Historians Group. The files of the noted historians Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm, declassified in late 2014, have helped greatly with the process of attempting to understand why the government was so concerned about communist influence within academia during the early 1950s. Other recently declassified MI5 personal files of note include those of MP Cecil Bing, nuclear physicist Robert Oppenheimer, actor Charlie Chaplin and author JB Priestly (all released in 2014). It is worth noting here that the vast majority of MI5 files required for the study of this topic have now been released. The key exceptions to this are those documents related to the historians John Savile and EP Thompson – both of which were released only in late September 2016, after this work had been completed. However, much of the material

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<sup>36</sup> Codenamed 'Wallflowers', Liddell's diaries were considered for a time so sensitive that MI5 kept them locked away in a safe. Aldrich & Cormac, *The Black Door*, p. 141

<sup>37</sup> Later edited for publication in two volumes by Nigel West in 2005, see Nigel West, (ed.), *The Guy Liddell Diaries Volume I: 1939-1942: MI5's Director of Counter-Espionage in World War II*, (Routledge, London, 2005) and Nigel West, (ed.), *The Guy Liddell Diaries Vol.II: 1942-1945: MI5's Director of Counter-Espionage in World War II: 1942-1945*, (Routledge, London, 2005)

those files contain is duplicated within the files of Hill & Hobsbawm, meaning that it is unlikely that these files challenge the argument made in this thesis. Those files examined have provided a useful cross section of MI5 analyses and help to provide verifiable evidence that the work undertaken by Christopher Andrew for his official history of the Service was broadly correct in its conclusions. Similarly, the declassification in 2015 of those remaining unreleased files related to the Philby, Burgess and Maclean cases has helped this thesis to build upon Peter Hennessy's work regarding vetting in *The Secret State* – the reports contained within these files demonstrating that the Burgess and Maclean cases had a greater immediate impact on the enactment of positive vetting than previously believed.

Though the National Archives at Kew has provided the vast majority of original source material for this thesis, it is not the only archive to have proven useful over the course of the past three years. The records of the Communist Party of Great Britain, held at the People's History Museum in Manchester contain extensive records of the Party's overt activities, details of which have been helpful from a contextual point of view. Equally, the Cambridge University Library itself has been a surprisingly useful source of original material. The Library has retained copies of several key examples of IRD's public counter-propaganda offerings dating from early 1960s, as well as copies of the original three editions of *The Reasoner* from 1956. Being able to examine these documents first-hand, rather than relying upon second-hand accounts and extracts has significantly assisted with the writing of both chapters three and four. Certain documents acquired from US-based institutions have proven informative, however the vast majority of material collected in the United States between January and March 2015 at the US National Archives facility in College Park Maryland, Truman Presidential Library and Kennedy Presidential Library has not been included in the final thesis. As the thesis has developed most of the archival documents retrieved from these institutions have proven to be ultimately tangential to the main argument and therefore, in the interests of brevity, deemed unsuitable for inclusion. The two notable exceptions to this are files from the US Embassy in London from 1951 which refer to the aftermath of ill-fated attempts by British students to travel to the 3rd World Youth Festival in East Berlin via US occupied Austria, as well as CIA policy documents concerning counter-subversion theory dating from the late 1950s, both of which were discovered at the NARA facility.

## Structure

There are, it would seem, four main questions to answer with regards to the conduct of counter-subversion policy over the period in question. Firstly, did the government's efforts to combat domestic communism between 1945 and 1964 contribute meaningfully to the decline of British communism? As has been well recorded by Francis Beckett in his 1995 work *Enemy Within*, and indeed communist activist Noreen Branson in her official histories of the Party, the British communist movement struggled to retain the support and influence it had enjoyed during the Second World War, and had been reduced to a shadow of its former self by the late 1960s. Did official counter-measures help to arrest communism's influence within the United Kingdom in any notable way, or was the ideology's eventual marginalisation within wider British society more the result of extra-governmental factors – particularly poor leadership of the movement on the part of the CPGB? Secondly, to what extent did official understanding of domestic communism change over the course of the early Cold War? Were official perceptions of the threat posed by the communist movement static, or did they alter over time in accordance with changing international circumstances? Thirdly, why was domestic communism viewed as a threat by successive governments despite its limited ability to impact directly upon political stability? The CPGB only ever experienced extremely limited direct political success, before being wiped from the face of the electoral map at the 1950 election. Meanwhile, as has been demonstrated by Hennessy in *The Secret State*, counter-measures enacted under Attlee during the late 1940s meant that communists had been effectively barred from entering sensitive official employment as early as 1947.<sup>38</sup> Equally, as shown by Andrew in *Defence of the Realm*, the Security Service succeeded in establishing a system of relatively comprehensive surveillance via which to monitor the CPGB's activities by the early 1950s, which thereby removed the Communist Party as an immediate covert threat to the state.<sup>39</sup> Despite all this, domestic communism remained a central priority until 1963, attracting the regular attention of security officials, senior civil servants and government ministers alike. Why did the threat of domestic communism trouble Whitehall for such a significant period of time, particularly given its early successes in marginalising the movement? Finally, were successive government's actions to counter-act domestic communism over the early Cold War predicated ultimately on

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<sup>38</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State*, (Allen Lane, London, 2010), pp. 105-107

<sup>39</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 402

political, rather than national security, concerns? As has been well established by Halberstam, Caute, Morgan and others, counter-subversive actions directed against the American left during the early 1950s soon spiralled into an anti-communist witch-hunt whereby notions of the ‘enemy within’ were exploited for political gain.<sup>40</sup> Did a similar phenomenon occur within the United Kingdom over the same period, or were British motivations somehow different?

To attempt to answer these questions, whilst presenting the material researched in as clear and logical a manner as possible, the main body of this thesis has been split into four chapters of roughly equivalent length. Each is concerned with a loose five year span, though there is occasional overlap in chapter periodisation when required. An argument could be made that this thesis would be better structured were its chapters arranged around each individual administration. However, given the significant changes in counter-subversive thinking and policy focus which occurred following the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, and re-election of Harold Macmillan in 1959, this argument is ultimately conceptually flawed – arranging this thesis by administration alone would obscure these two important junctures.

The first chapter concerns itself with the origins of post-war domestic counter-subversion policy and examines the reasons why domestic communism became a central preoccupation of the Attlee government during the years following the end of the Second World War. The chapter, which spans the period from VE Day in May 1945 to the outbreak of the Korean War at the end of June 1950, examines the impact of early espionage scandals – most notably the Gouzenko affair - upon Whitehall security assessments, as well as the rationale behind the introduction of negative vetting in 1947. It also attempts to explain why early counter-subversion policy progressed so cautiously, before suddenly escalating over 1949 and 1950. Most importantly, the chapter also examines the impact of crypto-communist MPs upon the Attlee government and how the Prime Minister’s concerns regarding this subject were grounded in verifiable evidence. The chapter deliberately does not extend to encompass Attlee’s second term, as the changes in thinking which occurred as a result of the outbreak of the Korean War makes this period more suitable for separate examination.

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<sup>40</sup> See, David Halberstam, *The Fifties*, (Fawcett, New York, 1994), David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1979), Ted Morgan, *Reds: McCarthyism in Twentieth-Century America*, (Random House, London, 2004)

The second chapter is concerned with the period spanning from July 1950 to Churchill's retirement as Prime Minister in April 1955, and attempts to show firstly, how changing circumstances in the wider Cold War affected the Attlee government's thinking in 1950 and 1951, and secondly how and why this thinking was subsequently adopted without issue by the Churchill government following Conservative victory in the October 1951 General Election. The impact of further espionage scandals – namely the confession of Klaus Fuchs in 1950 and defections of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean in 1951 – are assessed, using recently declassified material to show how formulation of counter-subversive measures continued to be fundamentally tied to concerns regarding espionage. This chapter examines the origins of offensive counter-subversion policy following the foundation of the AC (H) in mid-1951 as well as the formal incorporation of a counter-propaganda element via the creation of IRD's English Desk later that same year. Chapter two attempts to show how the government moved from an essentially defensive footing to an offensive one, whilst also examining the efficacy of early measures and assessing whether they were correctly targeted. By utilising the MI5 personal files related to Christopher Hill and Eric Hobsbawm, as well as IRD's progress reports from the period, the chapter attempts to show how the government began to attempt to undermine the ideological appeal of communism as well as ensure that its influence was marginalised within key areas of wider society.

Chapter three meanwhile is focused upon the period from the accession of Anthony Eden as Prime Minister at the beginning of April 1955 to the Macmillan government's victory at the general election of October 1959. A large proportion of the chapter concentrates on the collapse of CPGB support between 1956 and 1957. This section attempts to show how the Party's haemorrhaging of intellectual support was more the result of inner leadership failings brought on by Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in February 1956 coupled with the Hungarian Revolution over late October/November of that same year, than it was the product of counter-subversive policy success. The progress of counter-communist policy within the trade unions is also charted, as the chapter examines how private organisations began to be effectively exploited as outlets for IRD counter-propaganda. The origins of the Electrical Trades Union vote rigging scandal are analysed, and it is shown that much of the publicity which would later surround the case originated with efforts by IRD to raise the affair's profile. The chapter also assesses the impact of the



fledgling CND and beginnings of the New Left movement on counter-subversive policy as large parts of the radical left became reshaped following the turmoil of 1956.

Finally, chapter four is concerned with the decline of domestic communism as a central subversive concern over the period from November 1959 to the election of the Wilson government in October 1964. The chapter examines the reasons behind the brief escalation of official worry in 1961 – essentially as a direct result of Labour's defeat at the 1959 general election - and assesses the impact of CPGB attempts to hijack the 1960 Trades Union Congress and Parliamentary Labour Party conferences in favour of unilateralism. The chapter attempts to show the decline of domestic communism as a relevant factor in espionage concerns, whilst simultaneously showing that despite progression on certain fronts, government policy remained burdened with many of the same problems which had identified since the Attlee government. The chapter assesses the rise of wider subversive concerns and attempts to show that threat of domestic communism was not so much solved as reduced in severity, to the point whereby it became viewed as merely a single facet of a broader problem. Meanwhile, the chapter attempts to demonstrate that domestic communism's loss of influence within the trade union movement was a direct result of counter-subversive policy efforts conducted via the ETU electoral scandal and that it was the loss of the CPGB's industrial influence which finally consigned it to a position of secondary importance amongst official domestic security priorities.

Post-1964, the threat of domestic communism had receded to the point that it was regarded as merely one subversive threat amongst many. From this point onwards, counter-subversive policy became occupied by a far more diffuse set of concerns than had been the case during the years of the Attlee government and subsequent Conservative hegemony. Communism was perceived to be the central domestic subversive threat only up until the end of the Macmillan government. This thesis therefore, shall attempt to trace the development of counter-subversion policy only during those years whereby domestic communism was considered to be of central importance. An examination of domestic security policy between 1945 and 1964 encapsulates the entire period whereby communist subversion was considered to be a central concern by the British government.

### **Beginnings: July 1945 – June 1950**

The domestic communist movement as it existed at the end of the Second World War was judged initially by British intelligence to be something of a minimal threat to national interests. Indeed, communism was deemed to be essentially an in-house matter for the political left. Though attempted crypto-communist entryism to the Parliamentary Labour Party was of concern to Attlee and select members of PLP leadership (a fact which has been oft ignored by previous histories of the Attlee government),<sup>41</sup> this was judged by MI5 to be a party-political problem with little bearing upon wider national security interests. Such a state of complacency did not last long. Labour's shock electoral victory in August 1945 rendered the existence of crypto-communist MPs a matter of national security. Meanwhile, as a result of Igor Gouzenko's defection in September 1945, British intelligence came to the realisation that it had woefully underestimated the scale and pervasiveness of Soviet intelligence operations in the West during the 1930s and early '40s. As evidence gathered from the Gouzenko affair was assessed it became clear that Soviet espionage actively sought to cultivate and exploit pre-existing Western communist movements for the purposes of pro-Soviet indoctrination and recruitment. Subsequently meanwhile, as the Cold War became entrenched from 1947 onwards, repeat strategic assessments regarding Soviet capabilities and intentions concluded that international influence formed a crucial component of Soviet power. National-level communist movements were assessed as a fulcrum of Soviet foreign policy and it was judged that the USSR would seek to exploit its influence over international communism for the purposes of anti-Western subversion. As such, domestic communism became an increasingly significant, indeed central, preoccupation for Whitehall by the end of the 1940s. Where at the end of the war the British communist movement was something of a secondary concern for the government, by mid-1950 it was judged by ministers, senior civil servants and intelligence officers alike to be of tremendous importance to domestic security.

The Attlee government's response to the domestic communist threat was up until 1950 essentially defensive in nature. Domestic communism in the late 1940s was understood primarily as a security problem, rather than ideological one. Official policy therefore sought to identify and exclude communists from sensitive areas of government, however

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<sup>41</sup> Even John Bew's recent well received single-volume biography of Attlee fails to address this subject. John Bew, *Citizen Clem: A Biography of Attlee*, (Riverrun, London, 2016)

little attempt was made to undermine or marginalise communist influence more broadly. Attlee's security reforms, typified by the introduction of centralised vetting procedure in 1947, were intended to defend the state against communist predation, not to begin a political crusade. Counter-subversive measures escalated only slowly during the first five years of the Attlee government as ministers and civil servants sought to balance Britain's tradition of political liberty against an ideologically motivated threat. The relationship between British security policy and domestic communism between 1945 and 1950 was thus characterised by three key factors. Firstly, the steady growth of concern regarding domestic communist influence from a party political matter to a problem of immediate importance to national security. Secondly, the establishment of consensus that hostile Soviet espionage and foreign policy efforts were implicitly linked to national level communist movements. Third and lastly, a tendency within Whitehall to view domestic communism as fundamentally a security problem which would be best resolved via defensive counter-measures.

### **Immediate post-war assessments of subversion**

Within the Civil Service, as of the summer of 1945 genuine worry that domestic communists and fellow travellers could pose a significant threat to the stability of the United Kingdom was minimal. Indeed at the time, on the domestic front official concern was far more preoccupied by the surge of Zionist terrorism which occurred sporadically between 1945 and early 1947.<sup>42</sup> The combination of the CPGB's switch to strong support of the war effort following Germany's invasion of Russia in 1941 along with the formal dissolution of the Comintern in 1943 meant that communist subversion was generally considered to be at a low ebb. It was thought unlikely that the Soviet Union would in future look to incite mass subversive activity as a tool of foreign policy.<sup>43</sup> MI5's F Division (then responsible for counter-subversion) stood at a mere 24 staff members and was somewhat tarred with the wider reputation as being a haven for anti-Soviet zealots and the unduly paranoid.<sup>44</sup> As noted within John Curry's secret official history,<sup>45</sup> much of

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<sup>42</sup> Calder Walton, *Empire of Secrets: British Intelligence, the Cold War and the Twilight of Empire*, (Harper Press, London, 2013), pp. 76-81

<sup>43</sup> 'U.S.S.R., The Comintern', FO comments to the Northern Department, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1945, TNA, KV 3/303

<sup>44</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State*, revised edition, (Allen Lane, London, 2010), p. 84

<sup>45</sup> First made publically available 1999

F Division's time was taken up with convincing others that its reporting was not merely kneejerk ideological reaction:

'It was clear from the evidence available to the section that there was still a long-term danger to be feared from the Communist Party in spite of their ultra-patriotic line, but it was not always easy to sell this idea to Government Departments, particularly those who were profiting from the cessation of Communist obstruction and offers of positive help. Much rested upon the power of individual members of the section to convince our opposite numbers in Government Departments that our views were soundly based on knowledge and experience and were not merely the reactionary outpourings of people who had stuck to one job for so long that their opinions had become ossified.'<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, though F Division were at least attempting to monitor the domestic communist movement from a far earlier point than any other section of Whitehall machinery, their reporting on communist-related material was also often marred by a misplaced sense of complacency. This was recorded within the division's internal war-time history (completed in early 1945):

'New sources have provided a very considerable mass of information of a highly secret nature... It can be said that the detailed study of [redacted] on both the Communist and Fascist side has given to F. Division a knowledge of the organisational set-up and policy of the movements studied which would certainly be alarming, and probably instructive, to the leaders of these movements themselves.'<sup>47</sup>

Given that F Division were so confident in their reporting, it is unsurprising that a relatively relaxed attitude prevailed more widely across the government, even within the Service's higher echelons. Liddell, made a note in his diary entry for June 19<sup>th</sup> 1945 that:

'Roger [Hollis] came to tell me that he had a telephone check on a communist in the Admiralty called BARNETT. The check revealed that this man was a personal friend of Roland Bird (head of MI5's war-time censorship section). John Marriot [then head of counter-subversion] thought that Roland ought to be told. I am however inclined to agree with Hollis that there is not much point in saying anything for the following reasons: (a) Roland Bird may or may not know that the man is a communist but would not disclose anything of a really confidential kind; (b) he will in any case be leaving in a month or so; (c) he would feel embarrassed if he were at BARNETT'S flat and BARNETT started to call one of his communist friends; (d) Roland might feel, in view of his somewhat strong Left Wing tendencies, that the office was engaged in a heresy hunt and, worse, that he himself was not trusted; (e) Roland's present work is not really of a confidential nature; (f) if he has the intention of disclosing secret information to BARNETT he could have already done so.'<sup>48</sup>

The entry is in many ways extraordinary, particularly when compared against later policy and attitudes. Liddell was entirely unfazed by the suggestion that a relatively senior member of the Security Service was personal friends with a communist, whilst the fact that he decided not to pursue the matter further would seem to be evidence that he

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<sup>46</sup> John Curry, *The Security Service: 1908-1945*, (Public Records Office, 1999), pp. 350-351

<sup>47</sup> 'Operations of F. Division in connection with Subversive Activities during the war 1939-1945', June 1945, TNA, KV 4/54

<sup>48</sup> Record of conversation between Guy Liddell and Roger Hollis, as recorded in Liddell's personal diary, 19<sup>th</sup> June 1945, TNA, KV 4/466

believed the risk of potential damage to the State to be negligible.<sup>49</sup> However, there is perhaps something admirably civil in his well-meaning if naïve insistence that the political persuasions of an individual's friends should not raise questions regarding that person's own loyalties. In any event the entry aptly demonstrates the lack of concern over domestic communism at even the highest levels of the British security state at the end of the Second World War.

This being said, there is evidence to suggest that although British intelligence and the wider Civil Service were unconcerned with subversion in 1945, the matter was a priority for Clement Attlee from the moment of his electoral victory. The newly elected Prime Minister, was initially most troubled by the presence of so called 'crypto-communists' (that is, communist adherents who were not formal members of the CPGB) within the Parliamentary Labour Party itself. Of the 393 Labour MPs elected to the House of Commons in 1945, both Attlee and Labour General Secretary Morgan Phillips suspected that a significant proportion retained allegiance to the Communist Party. Whilst the CPGB was at the height of its electoral popularity at the 1945 General Election, its general appeal was still highly limited.<sup>50</sup> The fact remained that for ambitious politicians on the radical left the best chance of electoral success was through the Labour Party. That the PLP was being used as a vehicle for communist entryism was a view shared by the Security Service, although Attlee's concern regarding the matter was not. This much is made clear via evidence of an exchange between Guy Liddell and a Permanent Under-Secretary (most likely Geoffrey Munster, Home Office PUS from October 1944-July 1945) in April 1945:

'It might, however, interest Attlee to know that, having failed to affiliate themselves with the Labour Party, certain Communists were now seeking Parliamentary representation in the guise of genuine Labour candidates. P.U.S. [Permanent Under-Secretary] asked if we would inform Attlee to that effect. I replied that I thought the protection of the Labour Party fortress from such infiltration was almost certainly no concern whatever of the Security Service.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Liddell was not alone in this view, even as late as 1948 a certain amount of complacency continued as evidenced by the tone of 'Security Measures against Encroachments by Communists or Fascists in the United Kingdom. Report by a Working Party', TNA, CAB 130/37,

<sup>50</sup> The CPGB won two seats, and took on average a 12.5% share of the vote in those constituencies in which it ran candidates. N. Redfearn, 'Winning the Peace: British Communists, the Soviet Union and the General Election of 1945', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, 2010, p. 47

<sup>51</sup> Diary of Guy Liddell, April 1945, KV 4/196

MI5 regarded communist entryism to the Labour Party as initially nothing more than a matter of Party politics, and therefore an inappropriate subject for investigation. Pre-election, this assessment was most likely accurate – it seems likely that the most damage communists within the PLP could have achieved prior to the 1945 General Election would have been to adversely affect Labour's chances of electoral victory (in a similar manner to the damage wrought by the Trotskyite faction 'Militant Tendency' in the 1980s). With Labour's unexpected victory in 1945 however, the presence of crypto-communists within the PLP would come to have genuine implications for national security – as shall be discussed shortly.

British intelligence's lack of concern regarding subversion is understandable within a post-war context. What little work that was being attempted on the question of domestic communism was significantly hampered by that same problem vexing all other areas of British intelligence work at the end of the war. Namely, a substantive lack of both intelligence and intelligence sources regarding Soviet and wider communist intentions and capabilities. Whilst the Soviet Union, as would only slowly become apparent to Whitehall, possessed staggering numbers of intelligence agents both within the British security establishment as well as wartime nuclear research elements,<sup>52</sup> at the end of the war neither MI5 nor MI6 possessed a single Soviet agent of note and were equally hindered by a lack of even rudimentary understanding of their opposing Soviet intelligence agencies.<sup>53</sup> Though the VENONA project had been started in 1943, it had by 1945 achieved only limited results. Meanwhile, as discussed in the introduction, wartime concerns had lead MI5 to largely neglect comprehensive monitoring of the British communist movement. This lack of information made it extremely difficult for any British intelligence agency to present a compelling case in favour of domestic communism posing a credible threat to British interests and all too often reports were based upon comparisons of Marxist dialectic with overt Soviet actions rather than accurate and timely intelligence.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, structural problems equally hampered Whitehall's understanding of the issue. As recorded by John Curry, the process of

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<sup>52</sup> Christopher Andrew & Vasili Mitrokhin, *The Sword and the Shield: The Mitrokhin Archive and the Secret History of the KGB*, (Basic Books, New York, 2001), pp. 122-136, also Christopher Andrew & Oleg Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, (HarperCollins, New York, 1991), pp. 383-384

<sup>53</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 341

<sup>54</sup> For example: JIC(46)70, 'The Spread of Communism throughout the World and the Extent of its Direction from Moscow', 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1946, TNA, CAB 81/133; also 'The Soviet Government and the Communist Movement', SIS report, 14<sup>th</sup> February 1946, TNA, KV 3/303

attempting to understand the capabilities and intent of the domestic communist movement had long been hindered as a result of inadequate resourcing and organisational machinery:

‘Since the establishment of the Comintern or Third (Communist) International in March 1919 in Moscow and of the (British) Communist Party as a section of the Comintern in August 1920, the nature of this problem [communist subversion] has varied even more widely. It is safe to say that the machinery in MI5 – or the Security Service – has never been adequate to cope with this problem in the sense of formulating a comprehensive appreciation of developments as they occurred, and that during the greater part of the time the material for an adequate understanding of it has been lacking.’<sup>55</sup>

This was a significant problem, and was compounded by the fact that since the formal dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, networks of domestic communist organisations had if anything become only harder to accurately monitor.<sup>56</sup> A joint Security Service/SIS investigation entitled ‘International Organisation of the Communist Party’ dating from June 1946 provides ample evidence of this. The investigation – which was headed on the MI5 side by Roger Hollis, then working within F Division, and ironically by Kim Philby (with the benefit of hindsight one can presume he probably knew more about international Communist organisation than any of his colleagues) for MI6 - consisted of a series of reports into the historical background of the Comintern and focused upon the question of whether the organisation still continued to exist. The concluding comments of Hollis, and of the formidable Milicent Bagot, British intelligence’s doyenne of Sovietology and reputed inspiration for Connie Sachs – resident Soviet expert in John le Carré’s *Karla* trilogy<sup>57</sup> - summed up the prevailing view nicely:

‘Communists in the past were proud of their membership of the Comintern and its internationalism was part of their creed. It is obvious that an International which is so secret that the great mass of its members know nothing of its existence is in itself a conception very different from the old Comintern’<sup>58</sup>

This then supplemented by Bagot:

‘There is no doubt that the Soviet government continues to use the component parts of the old Comintern, but this report seems to provide no evidence that the Communist parties are being re-organised into a new Communist International’<sup>59</sup>

F Division recognised to its credit that the dissolution of the Comintern had indeed occurred as stated by the Soviets and that its revival in similar form would appear to serve

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<sup>55</sup> Curry, *The Security Service*, p.82

<sup>56</sup> The Comintern’s dissolution arguably itself a deception exercise designed to reassure the allies of post-war Soviet intent, as argued by Robert Service in *Stalin: A Biography*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2004), pp. 444-445

<sup>57</sup> Hennessey, *The Secret State*, p. 85

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Roger Hollis to Kim Philby concerning report on the Comintern, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1945, TNA, KV 3/301

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Milicent Bagot to Roger Hollis concerning report on the Comintern, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1945, TNA, KV 3/301

little strategic purpose for Moscow. However, it could not even begin to theorise what model may have replaced the Comintern, only that if Soviet subversion efforts were taking place then they were extremely covert when compared against the previous model of the Third International. Indeed the amount of guesswork, supposition and dearth of accuracy which formed the basis of British estimates post-war is demonstrated with almost wearying irony under the 'Counter-Intelligence Problems' section of the file:

'It is not likely that in direct espionage the Russians will in the future present more of a problem than in the past – though the possibility cannot be excluded that... their appetite for information on British and US war potential may considerably increase in the future.'<sup>60</sup>

British intelligence estimates immediately post-war woefully underestimated the threat posed by Soviet espionage. Moreover, the intelligence services themselves lacked not only the information, but also the means of obtaining information which would have been necessary to perform accurate analysis and indeed alert the services that greater analysis of Soviet means and intent was urgently required. This same point – applied across the British intelligence structure as a whole – became evident only in painful retrospect, as was made clear by Air Chief Marshall Sir Douglas Evill in his eponymous 1947 report regarding British intelligence organisation:

'The study of Russia was only started seriously within the last two years. The virtual absence of the most elementary and basic forms of intelligence on that country meant that there was, and still is, a very great leeway to be made up concerning Russia as compared with the rest of the world. Furthermore, we find the greatest difficulty in remedying this situation, largely owing to the rigorous security arrangements within the Soviet Union and the satellite countries.'<sup>61</sup>

Under the circumstances it is unsurprising that the threat posed by domestic communism drew little by way of ministerial attention at the end of the war and that scant preventative action was taken at that early stage. British intelligence at the war's end lacked the means by which to execute comprehensive and timely analysis of both Soviet policy and more specifically, its ties to domestic communism. Furthermore, such was the scarcity of information and resources, neither ministers nor intelligence officers themselves could yet identify that this constituted a major flaw within national security policy.

### **Subversion and Atomic Espionage**

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<sup>60</sup> Report prepared by the Counter Intelligence Bureau of the Control Commission for Germany entitled 'Russian Policy and the Counter Intelligence Problem', 24<sup>th</sup> May 1945, TNA, KV 3/301

<sup>61</sup> Appendix B, *Evill Report*, Sir Douglas Evill, 10<sup>th</sup> July 1947, TNA, CAB 163/7



It would not be long, however, before British intelligence was roused from its blissful state of naiveté. On the evening of the 5<sup>th</sup> September 1945 Igor Gouzenko, a Soviet cipher clerk employed by the Soviet military's Main Intelligence Directorate (henceforth GRU), walked out of his place of work at the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa with over 100 highly classified documents stuffed down the front of his shirt.<sup>62</sup> He then attempted to approach the Ottawa Journal, from where he was rebuffed, before the next day contacting the Canadian Department of Justice only to be turned away again whilst being threatened with vague accusations of arrest for being in the possession of stolen documents.<sup>63</sup> It is testament to the novelty of Gouzenko's 1945 defection that initially no branch of the Canadian government nor press wanted to have any contact whatsoever – viewing his actions more as a source of potential diplomatic upset than an opportunity to acquire exceptionally informative intelligence.<sup>64</sup> It was only once local police were called to Gouzenko's flat, after a neighbour discovered four individuals from the Soviet embassy ransacking the premises – amongst them the head of the NKVD station in Canada & assistant military attaché – that action was taken. After the arrival of local police, Gouzenko was brought to the headquarters of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in order for his story and documents to be investigated.<sup>65</sup> It was as well they were, for the documents revealed the existence not only of an extensive GRU spy-ring, which had penetrated the Canadian parliament, Department of External Affairs, Royal Canadian Air Force intelligence – but more shockingly that the Soviet Union had obtained 'documentary materials of the atomic bomb: the technological processes, drawings and calculations'<sup>66</sup> as well as fissile material via agents of Soviet intelligence embedded in Western nuclear research efforts. Indeed, it transpired that acquisition of this data had been in large part facilitated due to the efforts of a British subject – the Cambridge physicist Alan Nunn-May – who most notably had passed samples of enriched uranium-235 & uranium 233 to his Soviet handler a mere three days after the detonation of 'Little Boy' over Hiroshima.<sup>67</sup> These materials' usefulness in accelerating the Soviet nuclear weaponry program is demonstrated by the striking technical similarity of 'Joe-1', the first

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<sup>62</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 341

<sup>63</sup> B Division report on Gouzenko's defection, August 1948, TNA, KV 2/1419

<sup>64</sup> For the degree of shock and reversal of attitudes Gouzenko caused within Canada itself see J.L. Granatstein, 'Gouzenko to Gorbachev: Canada's Cold War', *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 12 Issue 1, January 2011

<sup>65</sup> B Division report on Gouzenko's defection, August 1948, TNA, KV 2/1419

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 341

model of Soviet atomic bomb, with the US 'Fat-Man' dropped on Nagasaki.<sup>68</sup> In a stroke, British intelligence was made aware of just how painfully little was known about Soviet intentions and capabilities and indeed – thanks to the nuclear aspect of the case – that the threat facing Britain from the Soviet Union had the potential to be so great as to be existential. Meanwhile, the files recovered also indicated that much of Soviet Intelligence's accomplishment had stemmed initially from their successful exploitation of subversive elements within the West. As stated within the Royal Commission report appointed by the Canadian government to review the matter in February 1946:

'The Royal Commission reported that perhaps the most startling aspect of the entire network was the uncanny success with which Russians were able to find Canadians who were willing to betray their country. In this connection they found that it had been "overwhelmingly established by the evidence throughout that the Communist movement was the principal base within which the espionage network was recruited; and that it not only supplied personnel with adequately developed motivation, but provided the organisational framework wherein recruiting could be and was carried out safely and efficiently."... They find that the evidence shows that in the great majority of cases motivation was inextricably linked with courses of psychological development carried on under the guise of activities of a secret section of the Communist Party'<sup>69</sup>

In the view of the Royal Commission, the success of Soviet espionage efforts in Canada could be directly traced back to the exploitation of domestic subversives, who provided an effective recruitment pool from which willing & motivated agents could be sourced, often in possession or having the potential to possess both professional influence and access to sensitive information. It follows then, that counter-subversion – specifically directed towards communists – was suddenly elevated from a peripheral position on the spectrum of British security concerns, to being one of central importance was in large part as a direct result of information acquired in the aftermath of Gouzenko's defection. By the point of Norman Brook's wholesale review of British intelligence, communist subversion was deemed a central responsibility of MI5: 'It is the first duty of a Security Service to counter subversive activities by communists'.<sup>70</sup> The outcome of Gouzenko's defection was twofold – firstly, it demonstrated to Whitehall that the Soviet Union was actively engaged in an extensive espionage campaign designed to undermine the national security of multiple Western nations. Meanwhile secondly, it indicated that to Soviet

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<sup>68</sup> Lawrence Badash, *Scientists and the Development of Nuclear Weapons: From Fission to the Limited Test Ban Treaty, 1939-1963*, (Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1995), p. 49

<sup>69</sup> Canadian Royal Commission Report concerning the Gouzenko affair, as cited within Whitehall's 'Civil Security Review', February 1950, TNA, PREM 8/1353

<sup>70</sup> Report of Enquiry by Sir Norman Brook into the Secret Intelligence and Security Services, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17

espionage efforts were designed around the exploitation of domestic subversive networks already present within Western countries.

This being said, official belief in a link between atomic espionage and domestic subversion was not predicated solely on the evidence of the Gouzenko affair.

Developments within the United Kingdom itself also helped to convince both ministers and security personnel of the heightened importance of counter-subversion to British national security. July 1946 saw the founding of the World Federation of Scientific Workers (henceforth WFSW), at the British Association of Scientific Workers' annual London conference.<sup>71</sup> The organisation, headed by a pair of noted scientists, French nuclear physicist Frédéric Joliot Curie & British crystallographer John Desmond Bernal,<sup>72</sup> purported to be a trade union and advocacy group for both scientists and lab workers, organised along professional rather than national lines. Problematically, however, both Joliot-Curie and Bernal were ardent and committed communists – a speech by Bernal at the group's first conference, held in Moscow in 1949, gives an idea of their ideological leanings:

'For now in capitalist countries the direction of science is in the hands of those whose only aim is to destroy and torture people so that their own profits may be secured for some years longer. They show this by their choice of weapons, not those of combat against equally armed opponents but weapons of mass destruction, for destroying houses and fields, for poisoning and maiming women and children.... The fact is that science in the hand of a decayed capitalism can never be employed usefully; it can only lead to increased exploitation, unemployment, crises and war. Under capitalism war is poisoning science... Only under capitalism is it true that science can bring no happiness, but only destruction.'<sup>73</sup>

More worrying for British intelligence, however, was the involvement in the group of the British physicist Norman Veall.<sup>74</sup> Veall had already been placed under surveillance as a result of his suspected involvement in the Canadian espionage ring detailed within the Gouzenko files, with not enough evidence being present to secure a criminal conviction.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Veall was known to be a close associate of Alan Nunn-May, having been

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<sup>71</sup> J.G. Crowther, 'Announcement of the World Federation of Scientific Workers', *Nature*, Issue 160, 8<sup>th</sup> November 1947, pp. 628-629

<sup>72</sup> Joliot-Curie an esteemed nuclear physicist, who would go on to briefly run the French nuclear program until American objection saw him removed in 1950. Bernal meanwhile a leading figure in X-ray crystallography. See Maurice Goldsmith, *Frédéric Joliot-Curie: A Biography*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1976) and *J.D. Bernal: A Life in Science and Politics*, ed. Brenda Swann & Francis Aprahamian, (Verso, London, 1999)

<sup>73</sup> J.D. Bernal to Soviet peace conference, 1949, Cambridge University Library, J.D. Bernal papers, E.2.5

<sup>74</sup> Though not nearly as renowned as Joliot-Curie & Bernal, the British Nuclear Medicine Association still awards an annual medal in his honour.

<sup>75</sup> Glenmore S. Trenear-Harvey, *Historical Dictionary of Atomic Espionage*, (Scarecrow Press, New Jersey, 2011), p. 215

supervised by him as an undergraduate at Cambridge as well as working with him at labs in Canada and had been assessed by MI5 as someone who would almost certainly seek to pass on classified material to the Soviet Union should he ever gain access to it.<sup>76</sup> The formation of the WFSW would appear to be precisely what the Security Service were most wary of post-Gouzenko and provided further evidence of domestic communist movements being used as fronts for direct espionage. As stated within the initial Security Service assessment of the group:

‘The W.F.S.W offers very clear chances to the Soviet Union and to her satellites for the collection and collation of scientific information, particularly on such matters as nuclear physics and armament production. Though it would be untrue to suggest that the W.F.S.W is at present being used as a Trade Union international for technical and scientific workers, attempts may well be made to bring this about, indeed for the purposes of interfering with the rearmament and recovery programs of the Western Powers, the W.F.S.W. can provide a useful instrument of Soviet policy. The future activities of the Federation can be expected to become increasingly covert, and to operate through the trusted Party members in each country who are represented in the W.F.S.W. affiliate concerned.’<sup>77</sup>

In other words, become the sort of network which had led to the large-scale penetration of the Canadian government, only now with a direct and explicit interest in scientists and technicians who might have access to Western nuclear secrets. The report was correct in its assumption as the WFSW actively sought to recruit nuclear physicists as an overriding priority.<sup>78</sup> Here then was clear and immediate evidence of a subversive front organisation being established on British soil, which had the potential to recruit individuals who might be in a position to disclose intensely sensitive information regarding British nuclear research efforts. Though the WFSW and its membership never ultimately threatened British interests in any particularly serious way – in part due to MI5’s extensive monitoring – the organisation would nevertheless remain a target of significant interest for MI5 for a considerable period of time, who maintained files on the group through the mid-1960s.<sup>79</sup>

Concern regarding atomic research also served to convince British intelligence that crypto-communist MPs within the Labour Party were a threat to national security. Labour’s election victory, coupled with Attlee’s decision to begin exploring the possibility of an independent British nuclear device in August 1945, meant that crypto-

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<sup>76</sup> Serial s.1a, TNA, KV 5/139

<sup>77</sup> Security Service assessment of WFSW, September 1946, TNA, KV 5/139

<sup>78</sup> See file TNA, KV 5/140

<sup>79</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the group’s history and relevance see William Styles, *The World Federation of Scientific Workers: A Case Study of Soviet Front Organisations during the early Cold War*, unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2013

communist MPs' theoretical ability to damage British security increased dramatically. Concern was caused not so much by fears that crypto-communists could actively hinder the government's agenda, as a voting bloc crypto-MPs were too small to actively disrupt parliamentary proceedings. Meanwhile, open rebellion gave PLP leadership an excuse to evict crypto-communists from the Party, as in the cases of the MPs Hutchinson, Platts-Mills, Solley and Zillacus, who were all expelled from the Labour Party in 1949 ostensibly on account of their opposition to the NATO vote.<sup>80</sup> Rather, concern on the part of the PM and Security Service was heightened by the fact that crypto-communists were by no means socially or professionally isolated from the main PLP membership and indeed retained the potential for advancement within the Party – which therefore meant that they had the potential to influence party-politics in the long run and, more importantly, could potentially eventually access sensitive information regarding governmental intentions. The case of Geoffrey Bing provides a useful example. Elected as MP for Hornchurch in 1945, Bing's early career was notable for a pattern of involvement with radical leftism dating back to the 1930s. The MP was active in a number of radical left-wing advocacy groups during the pre-war years and appeared on MI5's early-war Officer Cadet Training Unit 'Stop' list (listing those to be prohibited from gaining a commission) due to suspected communist associations.<sup>81</sup> Post-war proof of Bing's (and others) continued association with the CPGB was provided via MI5's routine monitoring of the telephone lines of known Communist Party members and CPGB headquarters:

'Victor GOLLANZ [noted communist publisher] [sic] rings Betty REID [CPGB organiser in charge of Party discipline] and they discuss the election results. B: Maurice WEBB [Labour MP] is in and so is Stephen SWINGLER [Labour MP]. Victor G. thought it a great joke that two communists had got in... He also asked whether Geoffrey BING and PLATTS-MILLS [John Platts-Mills, Labour MP] had been successful, but Betty didn't know.'<sup>82</sup>

Bing was not, however, professionally isolated from the mainstream Labour Party. As stated by the Security Service:

'The position of Geoffrey BING at the present time would seem to be of considerable interest. He remains a crypto-Communist and is in regular touch with the Party behind the scenes. At the same time he is being relied upon by Aneurin Bevan to an increasing extent and is regarded by Bevan as a key man in his organisation. It is stated that in the event of Bevan becoming Prime Minister of some future Labour

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<sup>80</sup> 'Lost Sheep: Expulsions 1939-1949', 1949, LP/GS/LS, Labour Party Archives. Meanwhile MPs Warbey & Chamberlain also opposed the NATO vote however were not expelled. The difference being that neither MP was believed to be a crypto-communist.

<sup>81</sup> B Branch memo, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1949, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>82</sup> Transcript of intercepted telephone conversation between Victor Gollancz and Betty Reid, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1945, TNA, KV 2/3812

government BING has been earmarked for the post of Chief Whip... BING is regarded, both by Communist leaders and the Bevanites, as the best tactician in the House.’<sup>83</sup>

The presence of crypto-communists within the Parliamentary Labour Party therefore had wider security implications regarding what subjects the Prime Minister could openly discuss and with whom. With this in mind, the PM’s decision to convene 1945’s GEN 75 and 1947’s GEN 163 (the Cabinet committees responsible for nuclear development) essentially in secret is placed in new context, as is Attlee’s comment a decade later that he justified secrecy on these matters on the grounds that ‘I thought some of them (Cabinet members) were not fit to be trusted with secrets of this kind’.<sup>84</sup>

This need for official secrecy helps to explain why the matter of crypto-communist MPs was elevated to a position of central importance by 1946. Within days of his appointment in spring 1946, the new Director General Sir Percy Sillitoe was summoned to the Prime Minister’s Office and instructed to inform Attlee – and him alone – about any MPs of whatever party who were ‘proven to be members of a subversive organisation’.<sup>85</sup> Sillitoe was furnished with a list of fifteen ‘lost sheep’, who were believed by Labour General Secretary Morgan Phillips to be crypto-communist entryists and asked to investigate the truth of the matter.<sup>86</sup> Such a request was indicative of MI5’s then place within Whitehall, whereby it was still directly answerable only to the PM, an arrangement which would only change in 1952 under the Churchill government following the Service’s delegation to the Home Secretary under the Maxwell Fyfe directive.<sup>87</sup> This being said, certain elements within the wider Service remained leery of Attlee’s intentions. In the case of Liddell, it took a personal meeting with Attlee before he was convinced to acquiesce to the PM’s request that all information on subversive MPs should be passed to him directly:

‘I told him about the summons I had had from Mr. Bellenger [Secretary of State for War] and that, in view of the letter from the P.M., I had thought fit to go ahead and give him the information that he required. I did, however, think that a matter of principle was involved. I handed to him a questionnaire asking him generally what action he requires to take in the case of MPs belonging to subversive movements, and in the case of MPs who had close contacts with subversive movements. Without answering each question in detail, he said that he thought that he alone should be informed in every case where we had positive

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<sup>83</sup> B division report concerning Geoffrey Bing, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1951, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>84</sup> John P. Mackintosh, *The British Cabinet*, (University Paperback, London, 1968), p. 469

<sup>85</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), p. 324. Unfortunately, whilst a sense of the subject of Attlee and Sillitoe’s conversations can be gained from Liddell’s diaries (Liddell occasionally filled in for the DG), no immediate records of their conversations are currently available.

<sup>86</sup> The name taken from the larger ‘Lost Sheep’ file maintained by Phillips which catalogued all individuals who were felt to have seriously transgressed the Party line. See: ‘Lost Sheep’ file, Morgan Phillips, General Secretary’s papers, Labour Party Archive, LP/GS/LS, National Museum of Labour History, Manchester

<sup>87</sup> Richard Aldrich, *Espionage, Security and Intelligence in Britain, 1945-1970*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1998), p. 126

information that a Member of Parliament was a member of a subversive organisation, whether that member was also a member of the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, or any other Party represented in the House of Commons. I thought he was not very specific; I gathered that he felt that he had a responsibility to the House and country to see that such members did not get into positions where they might constitute a danger to the state.’<sup>88</sup>

Worryingly for Attlee, the list the provided to the Security Service was neither wholly accurate, nor exhaustive. The identity of crypto-communists were not always obvious to the Prime Minister, which further heightened his concern. As recorded by Guy Liddell in 1947:

‘I thereupon gave him the names of PLATTS-MILLS, HUTCHINSON, Leah MANNING [educational reformer and Labour MP] and Mrs. BRADDOCK [Bessie Braddock, Labour MP]. He was not surprised to hear about HUTCHINSON, and had already taken it for granted the PLATTS-MILLS was a C.P. [Communist Party] member. He was however, considerably shaken to hear of Leah MANNING and Mrs. BRADDOCK. He then volunteered the information to me that he thought DODDS was a C.P. member; that SWINGLER probably was, and that D.N. PRITT almost certainly was. I said that only in the cases of BING, PLATTS-MILLS, HUTCHINSON, Leah MANNING and Mrs. BRADDOCK had we positive proof.’<sup>89</sup>

Given Attlee’s usual reserve, the fact that he allowed himself to appear ‘visibly shaken’ to Liddell, would appear to demonstrate the gravity with which the PM regarded the matter. In this case, his dismay was most likely caused by the fact that Braddock had, as of 1947, had just been elevated to a seat on the Labour National Executive Committee and thus was already in a position of considerable intra-Party influence.<sup>90</sup> The PM was aware of the problem of communist entryism to the Labour Party, however it was only once MI5 undertook independent investigation of the matter that its scale became realised.

From all this therefore, it follows that the catalyst for official concern regarding communist subversion was fear related to atomic espionage. As evidenced, these two subjects were understood as separate phenomena, however also to be intrinsically linked. The experience of the Gouzenko affair served to convince Whitehall that the success of Soviet espionage efforts ultimately hinged upon the exploitation of domestic subversive groups for the purposes of recruitment and transmission of information. That this model was not a purely Canadian phenomenon was indicated by the formation of the World Federation of Scientific Workers in London in late 1945 – a Soviet backed group which masqueraded as a union for lab workers and scientists whilst actively seeking to recruit nuclear physicists. Meanwhile, atomic espionage concerns also finally served to convince

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<sup>88</sup> Diary of Guy Liddell, November 19<sup>th</sup> 1946, TNA, KV 4/468

<sup>89</sup> Serial 333a, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1947, TNA, KV 333a

<sup>90</sup> ‘Elizabeth ‘Bessie’ Braddock’, *ODNB*, as accessed via:  
<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37214?docPos=1>

the Security Service that the presence of crypto-communists within the Labour Party was no longer merely a matter of politics, but rather could have a grave and detrimental impact upon the security of nuclear policy deliberations.

### **Early Official Response**

Despite evidence that communist subversion presented a very real - and possibly existential by proxy, due to nuclear research implications – threat to the security and stability of the United Kingdom; and also despite open acknowledgement that Britain knew far too little about communist intentions, capabilities and motivations – changes to counter-subversion policy and machinery were still ponderous. The explanation for this was comprised of several different factors, not least of which a tendency to view the escalation of anti-communist measures as unacceptable from a political standpoint. As late as 1949 the argument was still made that:

‘So long as the British Communist Party still remains a legal political organisation the Government cannot undertake officially any action to discredit it’<sup>91</sup>

Counter-subversion measures still seemed uncomfortably repressive, whilst the weight of evidence available seemed insufficient to favour increased security over political liberty. Beyond this, there was still a certain degree of mistrust between the Security Service and the presiding Labour government under Clement Attlee. Certain elements within the Labour backbenches still, erroneously, blamed MI5 for the publication in the Daily Mail of the ‘Zinoviev Letter’, days before the 1924 General Election.<sup>92</sup> Feelings of suspicion were, it appears, mutual – with many of the senior leadership of MI5 blaming – again erroneously – for the appointment of Sir Percy Sillitoe, a former police officer, to the position of Director General in 1946 (Sillitoe had in fact been appointed unanimously by a Whitehall interviewing committee composed primarily of senior Civil Servants).<sup>93</sup> Sillitoe was disliked from the outset, as much due to the fact that his appointment was perceived as a snub to MI5 careerists as base snobbery.<sup>94</sup> One particularly catty entry from the diaries of Guy Liddell sums up attitudes rather well:

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<sup>91</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom – Memorandum by the Official Committee on Communism Overseas’, 16<sup>th</sup> December 1950, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>92</sup> Michael Jago, *Clement Attlee: The Inevitable Prime Minister*, (Biteback Publishing, London, 2014), pp. 288-289

<sup>93</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 322

<sup>94</sup> As evidenced by the practise of established officers reciting Latin epigrams in his presence to mock his lack of a classical education, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 322



- '1) It is a mistake to appoint a policeman since the work of this office is entirely different from police work.
- 2) It puts the stamp of the Gestapo on this office.
- 3) It creates a false impression in the minds of police forces general and of the Services that MI5 is a kind of police dept.
- 4) It generally down-grades the office.<sup>95</sup>

Equally, it is important not to discount Attlee's personal outlook and style of leadership. He was not prone to alarmism,<sup>96</sup> had a tendency to want to believe the best of people and preferred strongly in adhering to the use of the Whitehall system of cabinet and committees as a means for facilitating both decision making and gradual, measured change.<sup>97</sup> As things were, it took until February 1947 and the publication of the Canadian Royal Commission's report into the Gouzenko case before any substantive escalation of anti-communist measures was made. By chance, the publication of the Royal Commission's report happened to coincide with the ministerial release of a pair of Joint Intelligence Committee reports, entitled the 'Spread of Communism Throughout the World and the Extent of Its Direction From Moscow' and 'The Communist Party as a Fifth Column in the Event of War with Russia'.<sup>98</sup> Both reports can be summarised nicely via the corresponding Prime Ministerial brief:

'The salient points from the conclusions of these two reports are that:-

- (a) Communism is the most important external political menace confronting the British Commonwealth.
- (b) Inside the United Kingdom it is sufficiently well organised to be in a position to cause considerable dislocation of our war effort.
- (c) Since the Communist Party is highly centralised, it is vulnerable to official counter-measures, the effectiveness of which would depend on the extent to which they could break up any war-time shadow organisation as well as the open party leadership.

The Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee consider that the situation that these two reports disclose constitutes a serious menace to the defence of the Commonwealth and one which will undoubtedly increase if counter-measures are not adopted.'<sup>99</sup>

As previously mentioned, the Canadian investigation into the Gouzenko affair had concluded that Soviet espionage efforts had been actively facilitated via the use of domestic subversive networks and moreover that such espionage efforts could feasibly be recreated in other major Western nations. As the preceding extract shows, this hypothesis

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<sup>95</sup> Diary entry of Guy Liddell, 17<sup>th</sup> December 1945, TNA, KV 4/467

<sup>96</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Prime Minister: The Office and Its Holders since 1945*, (Penguin Books, London, 2001), pp. 148-149

<sup>97</sup> I.e., what *Observer* journalist Patrick O'Donovan termed 'Attlee as public school headmaster' in 1948, op cit. Hennessy, *The Secret State*, p. 101

<sup>98</sup> Curiously, neither report receives much attention from Goodman in his official history of the JIC, despite their importance in shaping Britain's defensive response to the developing Cold War.

<sup>99</sup> Prime Ministerial brief regarding JIC report entitled 'Spread of Communism, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, PREM 8/1353. Full report can be found within TNA, CAB 81/133

was directly supported by JIC analysis which indicated that subversives could also pose a real and credible threat to effective British action in the case of war with the Soviet Union. Both reports were considered at the meeting of GEN 164, the ad-hoc ministerial meeting which provided the basis for GEN 183 (see below), and thus seem to have substantially influenced both the PM and Home Secretary's thinking regarding the nature of the communist subversive threat.<sup>100</sup>

In perhaps typical Attleean fashion, the initial response to these heightened concerns was the formation of a committee – namely the appropriately titled Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, or GEN 183.<sup>101</sup> Although MI5's F Division was tasked specifically with researching and countering domestic subversion, no ministerial body existed within Whitehall machinery prior to 1947 specifically purposed with its deliberation. The membership of the newly formed committee was particularly senior, chaired as it was by the Prime Minister himself, with the Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary, Minister of Defence and Minister for Labour comprising the permanent membership.<sup>102</sup> The subordinate working party was similarly influential, including senior representation from the Home Office, all three branches of the armed services as well as the Ministry for Labour, Foreign Office and representatives from both MI5 and SIS, which again would seem to indicate the severity with which communism was regarded by Whitehall.<sup>103</sup> Meanwhile, such was the perceived sensitivity of the committee's remit that great lengths were taken to ensure that its role was obfuscated as greatly as possible. The name of the committee was deliberately vague and intended to stave off accusations of political partiality.<sup>104</sup> The publically avowed purpose of both committee and working group being to 'Keep under consideration the activities of subversive movements, at home and abroad, and to make recommendations from time to time on any counter-measures that appear to be desirable.'<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, it should be stressed that the 'public' element of the committee was very much limited, its minutes were classified as top secret, whilst it was deliberately omitted from the Cabinet committees record book and listed

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<sup>100</sup> Minutes of GEN 164, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>101</sup> Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities: Composition and Terms of Reference, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>102</sup> Committee on Subversive Activities: Note by the Joint Secretaries of the Cabinet Defence Committee, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Letter from Herbert Morrison to Clement Attlee regarding the terms of reference for the Committee on Subversive Activities, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>105</sup> Clement Attlee to Ad Hoc Ministerial Meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

only as 'Committee 51' in non-classified correspondence.<sup>106</sup> With regards to its remit, in actuality the committee was focused almost exclusively on matters pertaining to communism. The minutes of an early meeting of the working party make abundantly clear that from the outset domestic communism was the only subversive element considered to be of particular import by the group's members:

'THE CHAIRMAN outlined the Working Party's functions and pointed out that they included consideration of all subversive movements whether of the extreme right or of the extreme left. IT WAS AGREED, after discussion, that neither the Fascists nor the Trotskyists were of any present importance and that only the Communist Party constituted a serious problem... The CHAIRMAN enquired how far the day to day activities of the Communist Party were directed from Moscow. MR. HOLLIS said that there was no evidence of day to day guidance and a great deal of negative evidence that the party was left to itself... There was no doubt, however, that the Party would accept any detailed instructions which Moscow might wish to give. The Working Party then considered the influence of the Communist Party in industry, the Armed Forces, the police and the Civil Service.'<sup>107</sup>

From this point onwards, any official mention of domestic subversion even without the adjectival prefix of 'communist' may be considered to be directed primarily at communism. Certainly fascism was an ideology of negligible influence in Britain by 1947, as official disruption efforts during as well as overt public hostility served to marginalise any remaining fascists to the point of irrelevance.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, Trotskyism was considered by officials to essentially be a mere fringe interpretation of communism – the distinction only really of minor technical importance and best left to political theorists to bicker over. Commenting on the distinction in 1942, Sir Desmond Morton then personal assistant to Churchill and heavily connected to British Intelligence as a result of his work with SIS during the 1920s,<sup>109</sup> commented in a report on Communism to the Prime Minister:

'Books have been written upon the economic theory of Communism. They are intensely dull... Only arguments with instructed "Communists" require an understanding of all the "isms", Communism, Marxism, Trotskyism, Fascism, Bukharinism and others. In reality they are all but detachable labels, affixed by emissaries of the IIIrd International or their dupes to whatever idea best suits their current plans.'<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Note to General Leslie Hollis (Deputy Secretary (Military) to the Cabinet), 7<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>107</sup> Minutes of meeting of Working Party on Subversive Movements, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1947, TNA, CAB 130/17

<sup>108</sup> 'The Employment of Civil Servants, Etc. Exposed to Communist Influence', Report by the Working Party of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1947, TNA, CAB 130/17, cf. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, Chapter 3: British Fascism and the Nazi Threat

<sup>109</sup> See Gill Bennett, *Churchill's Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence*, (Routledge, London, 2009), for a thorough appraisal of Morton's life and work,

<sup>110</sup> Letter from Sir Desmond Morton to Winston Churchill, January 1942, TNA, KV 4/266

To look forward slightly, that such a view remained relatively consistent and unchanged – if perhaps expressed with slightly greater nuance – is demonstrated by the content of Sir Norman Brook's 1951 report:

‘We cannot have multiple brands of Communism or multiple sets of ideas about it in the Security Service, and I do not think anyone would dispute this. The proper keeper of the Security Service conscience is thus the head of F-division, with those of his staff who maintain a proper watch on, and make a systemic study of Communism as a whole. But besides community of thought, there must be community of action.’<sup>111</sup>

That is to say, communists were communists no matter the stripe, and were to be treated in a uniform manner. As to where best to focus counter-subversion efforts – attention was directed first towards the Civil Service. All three branches of the Armed Forces reported only limited communist activity within their ranks and all by personnel who would soon be demobilised in any event.<sup>112</sup> Where previous contemporaneous counter-subversion efforts had been predominantly directed towards the Armed Forces and industry,<sup>113</sup> the late 1940s was the first time Whitehall had paid any real attention in the modern era towards disloyalty amongst the civilian representatives of the British government. Meanwhile, it is interesting to note that the report on communist activity in industry – delivered by Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans of the Ministry for Labour – was surprisingly conciliatory towards the subject of working class militancy. The point was made that although there was evidence of communist involvement in recent strike action, said strikes typically ‘had genuine grievances and while the Communists might have taken advantage of them, they were not primarily responsible’.<sup>114</sup> This was a view echoed throughout all wings of the British State during the Attlee period. 1950 saw the Home Office commission a major survey (the entire document runs to some 450 pages) of Communist influence in Trade Unions. This was a direct result of the 1950 gas workers strike, which had led to a sentence of imprisonment for a month (later repealed) of 10 workers under the provisions of order 1305 - a piece of wartime legislation first enacted in 1941 which effectively banned strike action in favour of a governmental arbitrations court. Again, the conclusions of the report were notable for the conciliatory manner with which they approach industrial grievance. As noted within the report:

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<sup>111</sup> Report of Enquiry by Sir Norman Brook into the Secret Intelligence and Security Services, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17

<sup>112</sup> Comments of A.V. Alexander (Minister of Defence) to Ad Hoc Ministerial Meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

<sup>113</sup> Policy Regarding Control of Communists (General), 1941-1942, TNA, KV 4/266

<sup>114</sup> Comments of Sir Guildhaume Myrddin-Evans to Ad Hoc Ministerial Meeting, 6<sup>th</sup> January 1947, TNA, CAB 21/2496

‘Special Branch and the Security Service both say that the Communist Party is not moving officially in the matter of the gas strikers’ appeals, but that individual Party members are working actively to ferment opposition to Order 1305 and to organise a demand among trade unionists that the sentences on the gas strikers be quashed. There is no doubt that the Party is doing its best by such methods to exploit a heaven sent opportunity of gaining sympathy among the rank and file of trade unionists by supporting their opposition to the prosecution of strikers.’<sup>115</sup>

In other words, outdated – and what in peacetime could be interpreted as openly combative – legislation served to provide a vehicle through which communists could attempt to gain influence. Similar problems were encountered as a result of 1948’s wage freeze. Though supported by the TUC (as was Order 1305), dissent and unofficial strike action broke out amongst dock-workers due to the policy. Again, there was attempted exploitation by communists, which came to nought.<sup>116</sup> There existed a recognition on the part of many in Whitehall that where poor relations existed between the government and trade unionists, often as not the root cause lay in justifiable frustration with an outmoded legal framework than communist agitation. It is telling that the advice provided to the cabinet as a result of the report was not to legislate for further powers, but rather to abolish an unhelpful law which only served to stoke tension.<sup>117</sup> Indeed, there seems little evidence that outright class-based suspicion fuelled any part of the drive towards more active counter-communist measures. The dock strikes of 1949 (during which Attlee declared a state of emergency and enlisted the help of the army to unload goods arriving into the country)<sup>118</sup> perhaps strained these conclusions somewhat, and the White Paper on the matter made reference to the fact that ‘the campaign was founded on the support of the members of the Communist Party’.<sup>119</sup> However, the majority of evidence available indicates that neither the elected government nor the intelligence services believed at this point that attempted communist infiltration of trade unions and industry presented the greatest subversive threat to British stability. By way of comparison, there was no rhetoric akin to the acrimonious relationship which would define later relations between officialdom and trade unionism, for instance the planned labelling of the National Union

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<sup>115</sup> Security Service F-Division to the Home Office, Note on the Communist Party and the Gas Strikers Appeals, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1950, TNA, HO 45/25546

<sup>116</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *The People’s Peace: British History 1945-1990*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990), p. 98

<sup>117</sup> Security Service F-Division to the Home Office, Note on the Communist Party and the Gas Strikers Appeals, 14<sup>th</sup> November 1950, TNA, HO 45/25546

<sup>118</sup> Aldrich & Cormac, *The Black Door*, p. 143

<sup>119</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’, memorandum by the AC (O), 16<sup>th</sup> December 1950, TNA, CAB 143/3

of Mineworkers as the ‘enemy within’<sup>120</sup> by Margaret Thatcher in 1984. Fears regarding the exploitation by communists of trade union militancy do not appear to have been the primary focus at this stage of counter-subversive policy reform. Certainly Whitehall was aware of communist interest in the unions:

‘The Communist Party has long recognised the importance of capturing British Trade Unions with which the Labour Party provide the political basis of the current government. It exerts an influence on trade Union policy and on public affairs generally greater than its mere numerical strength secures for it at the polls.’<sup>121</sup>

However, it still saw the main threat of communist subversion as ultimately emanating from the intellectual internationalist wing of British communism. As put by Peter Hennessey ‘it was the brains of the Communist Party carried in the heads of the professional classes against which the realm of George VI had to be defended’<sup>122</sup>. The conclusions drawn from the Gouzenko case give reason for this, the Canadian Royal Commission report shared with Whitehall attributed communist recruitment opportunities as deriving from intellectual groups and organisations rather than heavy industry:

‘ZABOTIN [Soviet military attaché in Ottawa], found already in existence in Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto numerous study groups where Communist philosophy and techniques were studied and where writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and later authors were read and discussed. To outsiders these groups adopted various disguises, such as social gatherings, music-listening groups and groups for discussing international politics and economics. In some at least of these groups dues were collected and the money used for various purposes including assistance to Communist Party leaders and the purchase of Communist literature... These study groups were in fact “cells” and were the recruiting centres for agents, and the medium of developing the necessary frame of mind which was a preliminary condition to eventual service of the Soviet Union in a more practical way.’<sup>123</sup>

The evidence Gouzenko provided indicated that Soviet espionage sought overwhelmingly to recruit from amongst intellectuals and that moreover implied that those employed in industry simply would not have access to the types of information sought by Soviet intelligence. Meanwhile, when analysing the British state those most likely to fit the intellectual template, as well as have access to the sorts of sensitive information which could prove of interest to a foreign government, were primarily employed within the various departments and ministries of the Civil Service. Claims that British security was fundamentally flawed by a slavish adherence to class-based snobbery until the shock of Burgess, Maclean & Philby’s defections forced reform should be treated with

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<sup>120</sup> Margaret Thatcher, Speech to the 1922 Committee, 19<sup>th</sup> July 1984, Margaret Thatcher Foundation, THCR 1/1/19/f3, accessed via: <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/136215>

<sup>121</sup> ‘Notes on the British Communist Party’ Paper prepared by the Reference Division of the FO, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1948, TNA, CAB 21/4018

<sup>122</sup> Hennessey, *The Secret State*, p. 87

<sup>123</sup> Royal Commission report on the Gouzenko affair, as quoted by the Security Service ‘Civil Security Review’ periodical report, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1950, p. 34, TNA, PREM 8/1353

considerable scepticism.<sup>124</sup> From all this it is clearly evident that certainly during the mid-1940s suspicion was directed predominantly at the upper-middle class – intellectuals and civil servants – not the working class.

### **Negative Vetting**

Still, however, Whitehall found itself hampered by obsolete governmental machinery. The risk of subversives within the government itself may have worried the Cabinet, yet Attlee possessed inadequate tools to enact precautionary measures. The implementation of the most obvious counter-measure, security vetting, was hindered almost to the point of uselessness by an antiquated and haphazardly applied system. With the benefit of historical perspective it is difficult not to agree that vetting procedures for the Civil Service were in dire need of reform. The report of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities Working Party regarding communist influence within the civil service made it abundantly clear the amount of variation and partiality inherent to the pre-1947 system as well as its lack of central oversight:

‘Normally, established staff are regarded as fit from the point of view of security for employment on secret work and in the ordinary way such staff are not vetted on appointment. Exceptionally, Departments may arrange for an established officer to be vetted, e.g., where the work is of a particularly secret nature or where the individual, by his association or record, has given rise to legitimate doubts about his discretion and reliability. The extent to which temporary staff are vetted must largely depend on the work of the Department and its arrangement.’<sup>125</sup>

As a result of Gouzenko’s defection, the detection of atom spies such as Klaus Fuchs via the VENONA program and the public exposure of the ‘Cambridge Five’ it is easy to – rightly – criticise the government’s, chaotic at best & non-existent at worst, approach to security vetting pre-1947. However, it is important to note that clamour for centralisation and standardisation of governmental vetting procedure had occurred internally for some time. Concerns regarding vetting had certainly surfaced during the course of the War, as evidenced by the Royal Air Force’s formal complaint to MI5 dating from 1942:

‘Director General – It is submitted that the methods, by which the Security Service investigate subversive activities in the forces, need revising. There are two reasons why this has become urgent. The first is the necessity for the Security Service to treat members of subversive political organisations with a uniform policy, whether such members happen to be in the Armed Forces or in the factories or in Government Departments... The existing organisation of the Security Service provides that when the investigating

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<sup>124</sup> Chapman Pincher was particularly fond of this argument, see *Their Trade is Treachery*, (New English Library, London 1982). Interestingly, MRD Foot also gave credence to this argument and believed that Philby in particular escaped punishment partly due to his social class. MRD Foot, *SOE: The Special Operations Executive, 1940-1946*, (Pimlico, London, 1999), pp. 202-203

<sup>125</sup> ‘The Employment of Civil Servants, etc. Exposed to Communist Influence, report by the Working Party of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1947, TNA, CAB 130/20

sections of F. Division find a communist or fascist in, or about to join, the Armed Forces that the case is passed to F.1, who apply to it their own rules and standards, which are to some extent different from those of F.2 and F.3... To sum up: the changing policy of the Government towards subversive political parties, coupled with the steps which the communists have taken to wriggle out of observation in the Armed Forces, obliges the Security Service to alter its arrangements and to investigate all subversive activities with uniform machinery and by uniform standards.’<sup>126</sup>

Moreover, the Security Service had already been caught out through the failure to enforce vetting standards during the War. Information gathered as a result of the arrests for espionage of Douglas ‘David’ Springhall, the national organiser for the CPGB, in June 1943 as well as the of David Uren, a captain in the Special Operations Executive, that same year had led to F division circulating a list of some 57 members of the CPGB employed in sensitive work in both Government Departments and critical war industries.<sup>127</sup> MI5 was forced to confess that these individuals had slipped through the system predominantly as a result of loopholes in the vetting system and an uneven application of protocols across government departments.<sup>128</sup> The ensuing investigation into communists employed on secret work, which was led by F Division, urged in autumn 1943 that standardised vetting procedure be adopted and communists transferred from sensitive positions. In a statement which was in hindsight highly prescient David Clarke, the officer in charge of the investigation concluded that:

‘The whole experience of the Security Service shows that members of the Communist Party place their loyalty to the Party above their loyalty to their Service and that their signature of the Official Secrets Act always carries a mental reservation in favour of the Party.’<sup>129</sup>

Despite such exhortations, little action was taken beyond the appointment of a token communist employment review board, before which only a single case was brought before its dissolution in 1945.<sup>130</sup>

It follows that the introduction of a standardised vetting procedure was not a radically new proposal, merely one which had previously lacked the necessary political will to be enacted – prior to the exposure of the Canadian spy ring it had been felt that ‘the governing factor was the need to reduce the burden of this type of work on the Security

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<sup>126</sup> Letter from Roger Fulford (then private secretary to Sir Archibald Sinclair – Secretary of State for Air) to Sir David Petrie, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1942, TNA, KV 4/168

<sup>127</sup> MI5 report on the Springhall and Uren cases, 1945, TNA, KV 3/303

<sup>128</sup> Annex to the final version of the ‘Employment of Civil Servants etc.’ report, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1947, TNA, CAB 130/17

<sup>129</sup> ‘Communists engaged on Secret Work’, Memorandum by David Clarke, 25<sup>th</sup> August 1943, TNA, KV 4/251

<sup>130</sup> Harry Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War, Volume IV*, pp. 287-289



Service to a minimum'.<sup>131</sup> It took the revelations provided by Gouzenko's defection, coupled with increasing concern over Soviet intentions before finally the impetus needed to begin to implement reform was provided. It is worth stressing here that, perhaps counterintuitively, the bulk of resistance to proposed vetting reform came from the Security Service itself. On a practical level the Service was deeply sceptical as to how effectively it could successfully prosecute mass vetting to the standard required with its current staffing and funding levels.<sup>132</sup> Government departments lobbying for more funding has been a constant since time immemorial – so this is hardly surprising in of itself. What is more notable however is to find that MI5 had severe reservations about vetting on the grounds of civil liberties and personal privacy. Perhaps as a result of lingering memories of Nazi Germany, MI5's staff and officers were extremely eager to avoid any sort of situation which may have found the Service drifting into the role of quasi-authoritarian secret police. The matter was not settled quickly and would drag on for some time. Guy Liddell's diary provides an excellent summary of the concerns, as he recorded his opportunity to voice them in person when meeting with Herbert Morrison (Deputy Prime Minister) in 1948.

'I said that I should like him to know that all these cases are handled with scrupulous care and impartiality, and that so far from being a set of irresponsible autocrats in these matters, it was our Department which was exercising a restraining hand not only on the Working Party set up by the Cabinet, but also on all Government Departments. It seemed to me that in the Press, Parliament and in the public mind generally a totally false impression was being allowed to grow up about the work of our Department. This could not be otherwise than extremely damaging to our work in the future, particularly to the cooperation we get from the Police, Government Departments and various administrations overseas. It seemed to me that there was a serious risk of our being used as a whipping boy...'<sup>133</sup>

Liddell was possessed of the understandable fear that MI5 would be forced into taking up a, undoubtedly highly unpopular, role of government inquisition only to find itself later accused as having acted in an unethical, indeed perhaps unconstitutional, manner should the political winds change. The episode gives testament to the novelty of the challenge faced in the late 1940s. Britain had not had to confront an ideologically based threat of this magnitude certainly within living memory, and the tools required to combat it often appeared strange and potentially suspect.

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<sup>131</sup> 'The Employment of Civil Servants, etc. Exposed to Communist Influence', Report by the Working Party of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 29<sup>th</sup> May 1947, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>132</sup> Percy Sillitoe asked that vetting responsibilities be kept to 'an absolute minimum'. Cf. minutes of first meeting of GEN. 183, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1948, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>133</sup> Diary of Guy Liddell, entry for the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1948, TNA, KV 4/470

Further evidence that vetting reform was motivated by a genuine concern for security, rather than a desire to enforce political orthodoxy, can be gained by examining the discussions which lead to its introduction. The government's argument was that the state had a right to protect itself and that adherence to communist ideology ultimately led to a divided loyalty.<sup>134</sup> Negative vetting seemed to fulfil the dual requirements of filtering out potential security risks before they could come into contact with sensitive information whilst simultaneously being in keeping with the requirements of British law and sense of liberty. The biblical metaphor 'sheep from goats' seems to have persisted as the illustration of Cabinet thinking at the time. The full quotation, derived from the 1947 Working Party on Subversive Activities report on Civil Servant employment as follows:

'This is not to say that all Communists would be prepared, even after long exposure to Communist indoctrination, to betray their country by consenting to work for Russian espionage agent; but there is no way of separating the sheep from the goats, at least until the damage has been done or suspicion is aroused, and even if a Communist Party member conceives himself to be entirely loyal to this country, he may not be averse from furthering what he regards as the constitutional aims of the Party by supplying information which may be of use to their political manoeuvres. Such an individual may easily become an unconscious espionage agent by supplying information which he thinks will be used for political purposes only, but is being passed to Russian agents by intermediaries.'<sup>135</sup>

With regards to the specifics, by modern standards the initial introduction of negative vetting, or 'purge procedure' seems remarkably gentle.<sup>136</sup> Communists were prohibited only from employment in areas where they may have been reasonably expected to come into contact with sensitive material, though this standard was applied in the loosest possible way. Even within the various governmental branches of the Armed Forces – namely the newly formed Ministry of Defence, Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry – it was felt that work could still be found for communist employees.<sup>137</sup> The aim was not to enact some sort of political witch-hunt within the Civil Service, though the terminology of 'purge procedure' sounds perhaps uncomfortably reactionary, but rather to enact basic safeguards within the Civil Service so as to hopefully prevent the sort of mass espionage network that had plagued the Canadian government. Moreover, security checks were initially made against an individual's personal file and did not entail a wholesale

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<sup>134</sup> Notes on meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1948, TNA, CAB 21/4018

<sup>135</sup> 'The Employment of Civil Servants, etc. exposed to Communist influence', Working Party of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1947 TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>136</sup> The current Developed Vetting form alone runs to 53 pages in of itself. See: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/61938/NSV002-Active-2-8.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61938/NSV002-Active-2-8.pdf)

<sup>137</sup> Minutes of meeting of Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947, TNA, CAB 130/20

investigation into their background and personal life. Such an approach was deemed distasteful and dismissed as being fundamentally unsuitable to British sensibilities:

‘We understand that the FBI system is extremely elaborate. Before any person is appointed to any Government post in which he would have access to classified information, his name is checked over FBI records and he has to fill in a detailed and lengthy form listing his ancestry and the whole of his career, education etc. He is then subject to intensive overt police enquiries based on this form. We consider that any such procedure would be repugnant to British thinking.’<sup>138</sup>

There is a certain amount of irony to be had in the fact that modern ‘developed vetting’ for individuals with access to highly sensitive material follows these almost exact same protocols.<sup>139</sup> The expulsion of communists from sensitive Civil Service positions was designed to be a justifiable security measure in the face of available evidence and was not intended as a witch hunt to expunge political ‘heresy’.

### **Measures beyond Negative Vetting**

Beyond the introduction of vetting reform in 1947 however, senior Ministers – up to and including Attlee himself – continued to exhibit extreme reluctance to consider the introduction of anything but a relatively basic and defensively oriented domestic counter-subversion policy up until early 1950. In part, this can be attributed to the fact that it seemed for a time that no further action might be required. As early as the April 1948, Guy Liddell reported to Attlee that vetting reform had sparked panic within the CPGB. As Liddell recorded:

‘I told Attlee there was a general atmosphere of depression in the Communist Party in light of recent happenings. They felt that they had lost the initiative. They feared that the party might be suppressed; they were destroying indexes, issuing warnings about talking on the telephone and taking other precautions... [Attlee] did not think that the British Communists would take this very easily and that it may well lead to divisions in the Party.’<sup>140</sup>

Despite this, there existed a growing appetite amongst certain quarters in Whitehall, most prominently within the Cabinet Committee on Communism (Overseas)<sup>141</sup> headed by the veteran diplomat Sir Gladwyn Jebb, for a more proactive and aggressive approach to counter-subversion policy. Informal experimentation with proactive counter-subversion efforts began essentially in 1948 with the formation of the innocuously named Information Research Department (henceforth IRD), a government body intended to

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<sup>138</sup> ‘Committee on Positive Vetting Report’, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1950, as circulated to the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1950, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>139</sup> Though considerably more pervasive, see: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/security-vetting-and-clearance>

<sup>140</sup> Diary Entry of Guy Liddell, 14<sup>th</sup> April 1948, TNA, KV 4/470

<sup>141</sup> Formed in early 1949

circulate 'grey' or plausibly deniable anti-communist propaganda.<sup>142</sup> Placed under the authority of the Foreign Office and ostensibly created with a purely foreign remit, IRD's operational responsibilities quickly became blurred enough to include a substantial domestic presence, despite the fact that no official domestic counter-propaganda campaign was authorised by the PM until 1950. By mid-1949 it had issued some 60 articles for publication within the United Kingdom as well as a weekly digest of shorter items and an average of 193 pages of information monthly via the Central Office of Information managed London Press Service.<sup>143</sup> However, attempts to formalise anti-communist efforts continued to be resisted. Attlee continued to be extremely wary of taking any action which may have been construed as antithetical to traditional British notions of domestic political liberties, and as such what followed was a period of protracted bureaucratic feuding between the PM and AC (O). Initial proposals in 1949 on the part of the Committee on Communism (Overseas) to begin to prosecute a domestic counter-propaganda campaign met with a particularly frosty response:

'In discussion of the proposals for action at home, it was generally agreed by Ministers that, from a constitutional point of view, it would be very difficult for a Government to take official action of the kind proposed against a political party which had not been declared to be an illegal organisation and was in fact represented in the House of Commons. So long as the Communist Party remained a legal political organisation, it was considered that it would hardly be proper for the Government in power to use Government funds and Government agencies for the purpose of discrediting it. It was thought that the policy suggested might cause particular embarrassment to the Home Office, since it would remain the duty of that Department and the Police to preserve the peace at Communist Party meetings, and to enable Communist speakers to secure fair hearing of views which other agencies of the Government were engaged in discrediting.'<sup>144</sup>

The exchange is evidence of the degree of caution with which Attlee approached the question of domestic counter-subversion policy prior to 1950. The implementation of domestic anti-communist measures was undertaken only with the utmost reluctance at each step, with the Prime Minister himself acting as a final check on undue escalation. At every stage in the development of Britain's approach to domestic counter-subversion over the early years of Attlee's premiership, the proportionality of any proposed measure was fully scrutinised and it would seem that neither the Prime Minister, nor many other senior ministers and intelligence officials (Liddell an obvious example), were ever able to fully

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<sup>142</sup> Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53: The Information Research Department*, (Routledge, London, 2013), p.1

<sup>143</sup> 'Progress Report: Information Research Department, 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1949', as circulated to the Official Committee on Communism (Overseas), 31<sup>st</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 134/3

<sup>144</sup> Response by the AC (M) to the AC (O) on the latter's report entitled 'Possible Anti-Communist Activities at Home', 19<sup>th</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 134/3

shake the feeling that by hardening the state's attitude to communists the government was in some way unwittingly undermining the principles of political liberty and freedom of association which were felt to underpin British parliamentary democracy. For these reasons, further escalation of British domestic counter-subversion was limited following the implementation of 1947's vetting reform and would remain so until 1950. There was however, one notable exception to this in the form of 1948's operation HILLARY. Drawn up by the Defence Transition Committee, HILLARY consisted of emergency internment plans should war with Russia have occurred. In case of World War III, it was intended that some 3000 possible subversives and saboteurs – 1000 of whom British, 2000 foreign – were to be rounded up and detained at a variety of sites around the United Kingdom, including Ascot race-course in Berkshire, a Welsh holiday camp in Rhyl and Holloway Gaol in North London.<sup>145</sup> Though clearly notable, there is a point of distinction to be made in so far as HILLARY constituted planning in case of war – escalation of counter-subversion planning for peacetime remained static.

### **Practical Considerations**

Irrespective of the political questions posed by the implementation of harsher anti-communist measures, the immediate practical challenges of enacting change proved formidable. Even the relatively modest reforms of 1947 demonstrated that the intentions of policy had already outstripped the capabilities of the State. For starters, Britain was still struggling under the weight of its wartime burdens - the cost of victory had been the loss of some 28% of pre-war national wealth, whilst loans taken from the United States to fund war-efforts totalled by 1945 some \$20 billion USD, meaning that the increase of additional official expenditure in any area was a matter fraught with difficulties.<sup>146</sup> The brunt of practical challenges was felt arguably most keenly by MI5, as the introduction of standardised vetting procedures increased the Security Service's workload exponentially. For the Service, which was still struggling as a result of post-War budget and personnel cuts, the additional strain was difficult to bear. Personnel numbers had been reduced to 897 in July 1945, from a war-time high of 1271 in 1943, and this figure had fallen still further to a mere 570 staff members by 1947.<sup>147</sup> Within F. Division and B. Division

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<sup>145</sup> 'Arrangements for Detention of Communists', 5<sup>th</sup> August 1948, TNA, KV 4/245; see also, Hennessy, *The Secret State*, pp. 106-107

<sup>146</sup> Peter Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire: The Demise of a Superpower, 1944-1947*, (Penguin Books, London, 2008), pp. 402-403

<sup>147</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 327

(counter-espionage) the burden of additional work fell particularly hard. An indication of this strain is offered by the following circular, which was distributed throughout B Division in the July of 1950:

‘For the last three years we have been going through a period of constantly expanding commitments and corresponding expansions of staff. The total strength of B Division today is 60, a figure large enough to make us stop and think about where we are going... However the constantly increasing mass of business to transact here has led to a crisis in management and a crisis in manpower... There has equally been an unfair burden of sectional work placed on all B.1 staff and the way which this has been shouldered has been much appreciated.’<sup>148</sup>

Counter-subversion responsibilities were, out of all the various disciplines the British intelligence services were called upon to perform in the post-war period, possibly one of the most difficult in terms of personnel requirements and amount of information required to be collected in order to make a reasoned and useful judgement. A contemporaneous CIA manual on counter-subversion tactics and techniques, dating from the mid-1950s, gives a good idea of the number of factors which had to be considered:

- ‘1) The Underground level of the party must be penetrated on a high level and in many places
- 2) Key Communist Personnel must be identified and their movements and activities brought under surveillance or at least intermittently checked
- 3) All organisations, groups, business and fronts suspected as being communist fronts must be checked
- 4) Persons in sensitive positions in government, the armed forces and strategic industries must be screened and periodically checked
- 5) Overt propaganda issuances of Communist missions must be monitored as leads to clandestine activities
- 6) Listening to foreign Communist broadcasts must be prevented by jamming, confiscation of radio sets and police action
- 7) Foreign mail must be censored to prevent an influx of Communist propaganda
- 8) Travel abroad must be controlled to prevent persons from participating in Communist managed congresses and training schools’<sup>149</sup>

Leaving aside the moral contradictions the document posed – particularly the fact that it advocated that the only way to prevent the rise of totalitarian communism was to utilise techniques so repressive that they would achieve essentially the same outcome – it is indicative of the amount of work necessary in order to run an effective counter-subversion operation. One only has to perform a cursory examination of a Security Service personal file to appreciate the sheer toil which was necessary to accumulate the amount of information contained within – the acquisition of travel records, telegram communication, telephone conversations, not to mention details of an individual’s social habits and connections was a labour-intensive process as was the job of analysing and

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<sup>148</sup> Review of B Division, Sir Percy Sillitoe, July 1950, TNA, KV 4/162

<sup>149</sup> *Legal vs. Illegal Status: Some Considerations Relevant to Banning a Communist Party*, Senior Research Staff on International Communism, Central Intelligence Agency, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1957, pp. 25-26, NARA, CREST CIA-RDP80

sorting the material so as to be able to make a reasoned judgement regarding the person's relative threat to the state. Mass monitoring of communists as well as increased vetting responsibilities presented a difficult logistical problem for the Service.

Nevertheless, despite the additional burdens the Service coped admirably with its enlarged workload. Partial coverage of the CPGB had already been in place since 1941, when the Service had seen fit to install eavesdropping devices within the CPGB's King Street headquarters whilst simultaneously tapping all telecommunications equipment connecting to the building.<sup>150</sup> As such, by the time negative vetting was introduced the Service already possessed the means to covertly monitor CPGB activities. For negative vetting to function as intended however, comprehensive information regarding Party membership was still required. Without accurate records to compare against, the negative vetting checks would be essentially useless (negative relied upon a passive check against pre-existing records, there was no active investigatory component to the procedure). The Service experienced considerable success in its efforts to obtain these. As a result of the series of operations codenamed STILL LIFE (covert raids against properties owned by known CPGB members) MI5 succeeded in acquiring comprehensive information regarding the Party's membership fairly quickly. The first major operation alone – RED KNIGHT – succeeded in 1949 in acquiring all Party registration forms for the Greater London area.<sup>151</sup> Equally, the Service experienced notable success in its endeavours to infiltrate penetration agents into the Party. In 1949 Sillitoe reported to Attlee that 'we now had quite a number of agents in the Communist Party who were well placed and gave us good coverage' causing Liddell to remark that 'the PM seemed particularly pleased by this'.<sup>152</sup> Again, the level of Attlee's personal interest in the problem of domestic communism is made clear here. For the PM, who was renowned for his taciturnity, should have openly expressed pleasure at the news of successful penetration of the Communist Party shows how important the PM felt the matter of communist subversion was.<sup>153</sup>

As such, by early 1950 the Service was relatively confident that it had the Party 'sewn up' – Sir Percy Sillitoe delivered a full statement to Attlee to this effect in April 1950:

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<sup>150</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 402

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 400

<sup>152</sup> Guy Liddell diary entry, 27<sup>th</sup> May 1949, TNA, KV 4/471

<sup>153</sup> Hennessy, *The British Prime Minister*, pp. 148-149

‘SILLITOE said that the Security Service now had an almost complete list of the membership (numbering some 40’000) of the Communist Party of Great Britain with particulars of age, sex and employment; and despite a turnover of about 10’000 members per year, were keeping the list up to date. In addition they had a virtually complete list of the membership (about 3’500) of the Communist Youth League.’<sup>154</sup>

The Service was therefore able to comment accurately and authoritatively on CPGB activities within a relatively short space of time. Though it taxed MI5’s capabilities severely to do so, nonetheless the Service succeeded in establishing comprehensive and pervasive coverage of the CPGB from essentially 1950 onwards. It should be stressed that MI5’s monitoring of the Communist Party was still at the stage intended as a defensive measure. Though information acquired from the Security Service’s monitoring of the Party would later be used to target propaganda and other offensive anti-communist efforts, at this stage surveillance was intended purely to facilitate negative vetting efforts.

However, whilst intelligence gathering efforts experienced particular success, direct legal reprisal against communists remained difficult. Even where subversives could be identified, the judicial options available for dealing with them were limited to such an extent that by 1950 Attlee’s Cabinet was deeply concerned that successful prosecution would be nigh on impossible. The Home Secretary stated plainly to the AC (M) in 1950 that ‘the task of his Department would of course be much more straightforward if the British Communist Party were to be declared illegal’ even if ‘the results of proscribing the Communist Party in other countries were not encouraging’.<sup>155</sup> Meanwhile a July 1950 Cabinet Meeting saw Sir Hartley Shawcross, then Attorney General, declare that ‘existing powers are inadequate. We aren’t at war. Acts which would be treason in war can’t be punished.’<sup>156</sup> It is not hard to understand why such sentiments were expressed – as things stood existing legal framework was wholly unsuitable for securing the successful prosecution of subversives. The Treachery Act of 1940 had been designed predominantly to facilitate the trial and execution of German spies during the war and in any case had been suspended in 1946.<sup>157</sup> Meanwhile, the law governing the offence of Treason – in place since 1351 and amended several times since, at this point most recently in 1945 to assist with the trial of William Joyce of ‘Lord Haw Haw’ infamy – was far too harsh to be politically practicable or indeed in any way in keeping with Britain’s sense of civil

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<sup>154</sup> Sillitoe to meeting of GEN 183, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1950, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>155</sup> Comments of James Chuter Ede to meeting of the AC (M), 6<sup>th</sup> February 1950, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>156</sup> See comments of Sir Frank Soskice to the Cabinet, 20<sup>th</sup> July 1950, TNA, CAB 195/8, similar sentiment expressed at the meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 128/19

<sup>157</sup> Treachery Act (End of Emergency) Order 1946, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1946, TNA, AM 5/348



liberties.<sup>158</sup> So began a long-running effort to invent new legislation which could be used for the successful prosecution of domestic communists in both a proportional and politically acceptable manner. The Working Party on Subversive Activities – still in existence though with responsibilities considerably reduced as a result of the formation of ministerial committees on communism – found itself tasked with the responsibility of formulating such legislation. The first draft of which was produced in late September of 1951, with its express purpose being to:

‘One making any act done with intent to assist the enemy a criminal offence without attracting the full penalties of treason, and the other... conferring powers to restrict visits abroad by persons possessing vital information’<sup>159</sup>

The bill was met with considerable criticism for the proposed scope its powers. Sir Frank Newsam, Permanent Under-Secretary of State to the Home Office was particularly critical, drawing particular attention to the proposed restrictions on travel for persons having knowledge of the aforementioned but ill-defined ‘vital information’:

‘I said that we had a general objection to the Act in that its scope was far too wide. In particular it purported to give the Secretary of State power to make orders against any persons possessing vital information but, in fact, the intention was not to make an order against a man simply because he had vital information, but because he was treacherous enough to want to sell his information to the enemy... It seemed to me that either when the Bill was before Parliament or, if Parliament passed it, when the Home Secretary began to use his powers under it, the fact that the intention and the wording of certain Clauses were at variance would come to light, and the Home Secretary would be unable to stand up to the criticism which would arise.’<sup>160</sup>

Reservations were echoed by the other members of the cabinet panel overseeing its review, not least of which was due to the fact that:

‘If the clauses follow the wording of the minutes of the meeting it will be illegal for members of an expeditionary force to land in such territory, for agents to go into enemy territory, or for war correspondents to ply their trade.’<sup>161</sup>

Again, the problem of how to define ‘subversive activity’ emerged. As demonstrated by Whitehall’s inability to draft acceptable legislation defining exact parameters for ‘subversion’ and ‘subversives’, the government was able to identify the problem, though wholly unable to articulate its exact legal categorisation. As a result of the Working Party on Subversive Activities failure to draft acceptable legislation, ‘subversion’ would

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<sup>158</sup> Peter Martland, *Lord Haw-Haw: The English Voice of Nazi Germany*, (Scarecrow Press, Maryland, 2003), pp. 88-99

<sup>159</sup> Draft Bill on Subversive Activities, 7<sup>th</sup> September 1951, TNA, CAB 130/71

<sup>160</sup> Letter from Sir Frank Newsam to S.J. Baker (Secretary to the Attorney General) regarding a proposed Subversive Activities Bill, 20<sup>th</sup> September 1951, TNA, CAB 21/4018

<sup>161</sup> Letter from R. Gedling to F.J. Heritage (Office of the Parliamentary Counsel), 15<sup>th</sup> August 1951, TNA, CAB 21/4018

continue to be understood as a loose and nebulous term, applied to those activities which the government found to be threatening, and yet were unable to categorise more formally.

### **Changes in Strategy**

As it was, with the notable exception of Operation HILLARY, further substantive changes to domestic counter-subversion policy did not occur in earnest until 1950, at which point Attlee and the AC (M)'s earlier reservations were revised in favour of a more proactive strategy. Though Attlee and the Committee had justified their earlier caution on essentially ethical grounds, the reasons behind the timing of the changes in strategy were in large part purely political. As is made clear via an examination of instructions received by the Committee on Communism Overseas in June 1950, the AC (M) were worried about the impact of harsher anti-communist measures upon Labour's electoral popularity:

'That decision by Ministers was taken shortly before the General Election, and it is understood that the Committee may wish to consider the advisability of now raising again the question of anti-Communist action at home. It is of course a fact that the terms of reference of the Committee confine it to stimulating and co-ordinating anti-Communist activities overseas. On the other hand, it may be argued that the activities of the Communists themselves know no distinction between home and overseas and that it is therefore impossible to draw any rigid line of demarcation between the spheres of the necessary counter-action... It seems therefore that the Committee would not be out of order in bringing again to the attention of Ministers the question of possible anti-Communist action in this country.'<sup>162</sup>

With Labour facing what was understood to be a heavily polarised electorate in February 1950, Attlee had not wanted to embark upon measures which may have adversely affected the already delicate balance of public opinion.<sup>163</sup> The PM was correct to be concerned about his Party's popular appeal, as evidenced by the fact that Labour proceeded to lose 78 seats in the February 1950 general election, leaving Attlee with a majority in the House of Commons of only five MPs.<sup>164</sup> However, whilst the timing of further counter-subversive reform was almost certainly political in nature the underlying reasons underpinning Attlee and wider senior ministers' change in opinion were fundamentally tied to national security developments which had occurred since 1947. Since the introduction of negative vetting in spring 1947, relations with the Soviet Union had deteriorated still further. In February 1948 the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia seized power via a Soviet-backed coup d'état. Meanwhile, at the end of June 1948, the USSR moved to block all transport links between the western areas of Berlin and western

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<sup>162</sup> Note by the Joint Secretaries to the Committee on Communism (Overseas), 5<sup>th</sup> June 1950, TNA, CAB 134/3

<sup>163</sup> Kynaston, *Austerity Britain*, pp 377-380

<sup>164</sup> Kenneth O. Morgan, *Labour in Power: 1945-1951*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987), p. 405

Germany, resulting in a blockade which lasted eleven months and was only lifted following prolonged airlift efforts by the Western powers. Both actions were unpredicted by British intelligence estimates.<sup>165</sup> More alarmingly, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1949 the West became aware of the first successful Soviet atomic weapons test. Again the event caught Whitehall wholly off-guard, JIC estimations had predicted that the Soviets would obtain nuclear weapons no earlier than 1954.<sup>166</sup> Liddell recorded in his diary that:

‘The story was given out at the JIC last Friday week under a melodramatic bond of secrecy. Hayter [then chair of the JIC and later ambassador to Moscow] cleared the room of secretaries and then said if there was anybody present who could not keep what was going to be said to himself, would he kindly leave the room... It was then announced by Perrin of Atomic Energy that the explosion of an atomic bomb had occurred in Russia.’<sup>167</sup>

The news prompted such consternation within Whitehall that had Harry Truman not publically announced the news a week later, it seems likely that the British government would have attempted to keep the event a secret indefinitely.<sup>168</sup> If war with the Soviet Union were to occur, it would now be nuclear – and therefore existential - in nature.

It was this concern regarding the ideological component of Soviet power which lead to changes regarding domestic counter-subversive measures. The first sign of an intensified anti-communist policy was the convention, under the direct chairmanship of Clement Attlee, of the Cabinet Committee on Communism (AC (M)) on Dec 31<sup>st</sup> 1949.<sup>169</sup> This committee, which ultimately superseded the responsibilities of the Cabinet Committee for Subversive Activities, was notable for its seniority (its permanent membership was comprised of Clement Attlee, Herbert Morrison, Ernest Bevin, Hugh Gaitskell and Minister of Defence, Emmanuel Shinwell) as well as the degree to which it dispensed with many of the niceties of its predecessor. Gone were many of the foibles over appearing politically impartial. Indeed, the committee was explicitly tasked with the responsibility of keeping a ‘continuing watch on the Communist threat to national security, to make recommendations to ministers and, under their supervision, to co-ordinate such activities as might be approved’.<sup>170</sup> It is clear from the committee’s minutes that domestic communism and communists were now firmly linked in the minds of

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<sup>165</sup> Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, pp. 260-261

<sup>166</sup> Richard J. Aldrich and Michael Coleman, ‘The Cold War, the JIC and British Signals Intelligence, 1948’, *Intelligence and National Security*, Volume 4, Issue 3, July 1989, pp.535-538

<sup>167</sup> Diary of Guy Liddell, entry for 24<sup>th</sup> September 1949, TNA, KV 4/471

<sup>168</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p.386

<sup>169</sup> Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Communism – Composition and Terms of Reference’, 31<sup>st</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

ministers with the increasingly grave threat posed by the USSR. Whereas the reforms of 1947 had prompted discussion regarding the exact extent of communism's threat to the British state and there had been a temptation to perhaps regard communists as political eccentrics – possessed of questionable beliefs and of unknown loyalty but not by definition 'dangerous' unless recruited by Soviet intelligence – communists were now firmly regarded as a direct threat to British security regardless of any specific foreign connections.

Whilst in early 1947 the government could still plausibly convince itself that Soviet Russia presented only a limited challenge to British interests, by 1950 it had become unmistakably clear that the USSR posed a central threat – both ideologically and existentially – to the security of the United Kingdom. The comments of Sir Gladwyn Jebb to the Imperial Defence College in early 1950 illustrate the new mind-set well:

'The phrase "cold war" may be defined as "a worldwide struggle against Stalinist Communism, not involving world war". This involves primarily a struggle for the minds of men and women – for spiritual allegiance... This definition would not exclude actual warlike acts (e.g. as in Malaya or Greece) and might even involve a localised war (e.g. a war between the Soviet Union and Tito or between Albania and Greece). It would range, in fact, from a sermon from the Archbishop of Canterbury on the necessity for the adoption of Christian principles, to efforts by General Mao's Government to suborn the native population of Hong Kong.'<sup>171</sup>

'Warlike acts' which directly involved the United Kingdom were to come more quickly than anticipated, as communist North Korea invaded its Southern democratic counterpart on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1950. The action caught Whitehall entirely off guard, as the JIC had predicted over preceding months that North Korean activities would most likely be restricted to small-scale guerrilla incursions rather than a full military offensive.<sup>172</sup> Events moved quickly. That same day, the United States secured a resolution of the United Nations Security Council condemning North Korea's actions.<sup>173</sup> On the 27<sup>th</sup> June, a resolution was passed recommending UN members supply military assistance to the Republic of Korea.<sup>174</sup> On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the British Chiefs of Staff recommended to Attlee 'that we demonstrate to the world, and to the Russians and Eastern peoples in particular, our

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<sup>171</sup> Lecture by Sir Gladwyn Jebb to the Imperial Defence College on the subject of the Cold War, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1950, TNA, CAB 134/3

<sup>172</sup> Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, pp. 309-310

<sup>173</sup> *UN Security Council Resolution 82*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1950, accessed via: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/82\(1950\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/82(1950))

<sup>174</sup> *UN Security Council Resolution 83*, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1950, accessed via: [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/83\(1950\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/83(1950))

solidarity of purpose'.<sup>175</sup> Britain was now involved in a 'hot' war with a communist power. Importantly meanwhile, Britain's entry into the Korean War was directly opposed by the CPGB who chose instead to back the North Korean communists, denouncing American and British actions as 'imperialist aggression'.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, in time, the Party would go so far as to attempt to exploit British prisoners of war as vehicles for anti-capitalist propaganda.<sup>177</sup> As a result of its support for North Korea, the communist movement could be now interpreted as an openly hostile political movement. Therefore, as a result of increased tension with the Soviet Union and outbreak of hostilities with North Korea, the stage was set for an escalation of anti-communist policy. Domestic security policy had typically attempted to avoid offensive counter-subversion measures during the later 1940s. The early 1950s by contrast, would be defined by a far more aggressive stance.

## **Summary**

Where domestic communist subversion was a peripheral concern for the British government in 1945, it can be definitively said that by 1950 it was a central one. The material gained as a result of the Gouzenko defection made clear not only the scale of the threat posed by Soviet espionage but also indicated that its success was directly linked to the effective exploitation of subversive elements within Western nations. Analysis by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police after the event directly linked Soviet agent recruitment to subversive groups pre-existing within Canada. Soviet friendship groups, peace movements and communist study groups all offered Soviet intelligence ideologically sympathetic individuals to co-opt and utilise in gaining sensitive Western governmental information. To effectively counter Soviet espionage it seemed implicit that Britain would have to take steps to monitor or repress communist groups within the United Kingdom. Discovery of Soviet espionage activity meant that increasingly domestic communism became viewed as an implicit security threat. Whereas in 1945 communists could be

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<sup>175</sup> W. Elliot (Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence) to Clement Attlee, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1950, TNA, DEFE 11/193, op cit. Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, p. 311

<sup>176</sup> Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-1951*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997), pp. 214-215

<sup>177</sup> S.P. McKenzie, *British Prisoners of the Korean War*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2012), p. 45

dismissed for the most part as at best political eccentrics and worst minor nuisances, by 1950 communism and communists presented an existential threat British parliamentary democracy. The steady partition of Europe, combined with further revelations as to the extent of Soviet espionage success and the detonation of the first Soviet atomic weapon meant that by 1950, communism now clearly posed an immediate ideological and kinetic threat to British stability and security. Moreover, as a result of the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the Cold War now possessed a 'hot' component. With British and Soviet interests now so obviously oppositional, the continued presence of a significant group of individuals within Britain possessed of pro-Soviet sympathies became a cause for credible concern.

However, whilst the conception of domestic communist subversion as a threat can be viewed as a fairly linear progression – from ignorance, to mild, to severe concern – the enactment of counter-subversion policy was a slightly more convoluted affair. Though acknowledgement of the threat developed steadily, there remained throughout the period an uncertainty amongst both ministers and civil servants alike as to what constituted proportional response. The ideological nature of the problem presented uncomfortable ramifications for political liberty within the United Kingdom, whilst constitutional, legal and indeed historical precedent meant that there was justifiable reluctance to enact overt political repression. To this end, the majority of counter-subversion practice under Attlee between 1945 and 1950 was reactive rather than proactive. The political willpower to enact vetting could only be mustered as a combination of the Gouzenko incident and JIC analysis of the USSR as a growing threat. Meanwhile it was not until successful Soviet atomic weapons testing took place that explicit and focused examination of domestic communism at a Cabinet committee level took place. The result was that by 1950 growing frustration existed within Whitehall that government measures to combat communism were ultimately proving ineffective. The lasting impact of the late 1940s therefore was to force communist subversion to the fore of security concerns as well as to provide many of the basic governmental mechanisms which would be used to defend the state against the problem. Long term meanwhile, frustrations over the failings and perhaps excessively cautious nature of the Government's initial approach laid the groundwork for a more aggressive and combative approach to counter-subversion to begin to implemented beginning in 1950. The problem was recognised at least partially as

early as 1945, however it was not until the 50s that a proactive strategy would begin to be utilised in earnest.

### **Escalation: July 1950 - April 1955**

By July 1950 countering domestic communism had become a central priority for the British government. The experiences of the late 1940s served to convince both ministers and civil servants alike that the domestic communist movement presented a credible and pressing threat to the national security of the United Kingdom. However, the development of counter-subversion strategy during the first five years of the Attlee government had, for the most part, been ultimately cautious and defensive in nature. The early '50s, by contrast, saw Whitehall embrace a far more aggressive and pro-active model of counter-subversion which would set the template for the remainder of the early Cold War. The discovery of further Soviet espionage (under wartime conditions) in 1950 and early 1951 provided the catalyst for the escalation of counter-subversive measures. In particular, worries regarding communism's ideological reach lead to an increased focus on the communist movement in academia beginning in late 1951. Concerns regarding communist influence in the trade unions also became heightened, as the ongoing Korean War brought the matter of rearmament to the fore. Vetting procedure was significantly strengthened, whilst the government exhibited an increased willingness to utilise so-called 'grey' propaganda in a redoubled effort to undermine communism's ideological appeal. Meanwhile, though a change of government occurred in October 1951 as the Conservative Party returned to power under Winston Churchill, the escalation of counter-subversive policy during the early 1950s was not the product of changed political leadership. Rather, the evidence available suggests that the Churchill administration was largely in consensus with the Attlee government on domestic security matters, and continued the development of counter-subversive measures on the grounds of conclusions drawn by its Labour predecessor.

Prosecuting an offensive campaign of counter-subversion proved more difficult than the introduction of defensive measures however. Whilst it was clear that communism held no great political sway over British public sympathy as a whole, as the CPGB's electoral collapse in both the 1950 and 1951 general elections proved,<sup>178</sup> Whitehall continued to be vexed by the question of how best to account for the raw ideological appeal of communism to certain individuals. It was this confusion which lead to the surveillance of

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<sup>178</sup> The Party decided to run 100 candidates in the 1950 election, however polled only 91,765 votes (compared to 97,945 votes for 21 candidates in 1945). As a result the Party lost both its seats in parliament, whilst only three candidates polled highly enough to warrant the return of their deposits. Keith Laybourne, *Marxism in Britain: Dissent, Decline and Re-emergence, 1945-c. 2000*, (Routledge, London, 2006), p. 22



known communist figures within the universities in an attempt as much to understand the problem as well as to disrupt what were viewed as potential channels for communist recruitment. Unfortunately these efforts were too often defined by amateurism and ill-defined purpose, thus meaning that the state wasted considerable time and resources investigating individuals who presented little threat to British interests. Early efforts to reduce communist influence within industry also experienced limited success. IRD's domestic propaganda network was still not fully formed as of the early 1950s, and as such official attempts to marginalise communists in heavy industry did little to undermine communist influence in those unions where the CPGB was most heavily entrenched. As such, the progress of domestic counter-subversion policy in the early 1950s can be understood as characterised by two main trends. The first, an altered focus towards an offensive counter-subversion model which sought to undermine communism's ideological appeal rather than merely guard against communist access to the state. The second, a tendency for this new focus to experience only limited success, particularly when compared against the efficacy of defensive measures. The early 1950s were very much a period of experimentation and refinement with regards to counter-subversion policy, perfection was still yet to be achieved.

### **Impact of the Wider Cold War**

The shock of the Soviet Union's early acquisition of nuclear weaponry in 1949, coupled with the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 demonstrated to Whitehall that there was a clear need for reassessment of Soviet intentions and capabilities. Crucially, by late 1950 the Soviet threat was assessed as being as much a product of ideological appeal as it was raw military power. As the JIC put it:

'The Soviet Union can only be understood if it is realised that it is not merely, like Nazi Germany, a totalitarian dictatorship engaged in power politics, but a unique and abnormal member of international society, inspired by a dynamic ideology with strong international appeal.'<sup>179</sup>

The view that the USSR possessed 'a dynamic ideology with strong international appeal' had immediate and serious ramifications for the conduct of counter-subversion policy. Due to the fact that the domestic communist movement was now regarded as an integral component of the overall Soviet threat, fears regarding 'fifth column' type activities

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<sup>179</sup> 'Basic Review of the Foreign Policy and Strategy of the Soviet Union', JIC(50)6(Final), 9<sup>th</sup> October 1950, CAB 158/9, op cit. Michael Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, (Routledge, London, 2014), p. 261

became heightened, particularly due to the CPGB's open support for North Korea. The comments of the AC (O) to the AC (M) from December 1950 illustrate this point well:

'In part, Communist activities in the United Kingdom are those of a legitimate political movement... But Communism is a world-wide force directed from the centre in the interests of Russian imperialism and we cannot treat Communism in the United Kingdom as a democratic political issue detached from the main Soviet threat to our existence. It is part and parcel of that threat, and there are a number of manifestations of Communist activity in the United Kingdom which are in the nature of a conspiracy organised against our national survival. They include attempts which have been made to ruin our economic recovery, to obstruct the implementation of the North Atlantic Treaty and, by exploiting the forces of pacifism and defeatism, to damage our rearmament programme.'<sup>180</sup>

Such a view was accepted by the AC (M), as indicated by the comments of the Deputy Prime Minister, Herbert Morrison, in February 1951: 'The British Communist Party... were undoubtedly making themselves felt by disseminating false ideas and untrue pictures of national policy. They were having an effect on the minds of people which was none the less real for being sub-conscious'.<sup>181</sup> Importantly, it can be seen that discussion of communist subversion increasingly focused upon its influence within wider society, rather than its direct impact upon the government itself. It was increasingly understood that counter-subversion policy could no longer be restricted solely to defensive efforts designed only to protect the immediate state. Communist subversion was increasingly judged to be an ideological threat which affected the whole of British society – not merely a facilitator of espionage - and therefore required proactive efforts to directly counter the spread of its influence.

### **Role of MI5**

Despite changing appreciations of the nature of the communist threat, the Security Service continued to remain central to Whitehall's counter-subversion efforts. Countering domestic communism had become a central priority for the Service by the early 1950s, as is made abundantly clear by the extent of institutional review and restructuring efforts which occurred during the early portion of the decade. The conclusions of the Brook Report of Enquiry into the Secret Intelligence and Security Services illustrate the extent to which counter-subversive responsibilities preoccupied the Service by 1951:

'A high proportion of the total resources of the Security Service are at present devoted to the countering of subversive activities, mainly the study of Communism and Communists. Since the end of the war the Security Service has set itself the aim of building up, and keeping up to date, a complete list of all the

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<sup>180</sup> 'Communism in the United Kingdom', memorandum by the AC (O) to the AC (M), 16<sup>th</sup> December 1950, TNA, CAB 134/3

<sup>181</sup> Comments of Herbert Morrison (Deputy Prime Minister) to the Cabinet Ministerial Committee on Communism, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1951, CAB 134/2

members of the British Communist Party and its affiliated bodies, such as the Young Communist League. In this work it has achieved a remarkable degree of success: it has built up an almost complete list of Communist Party members, and its technique should ensure that this list is kept fully up to date. In addition to a fairly complete knowledge of the Communist Party Headquarters, it is also building up a detailed picture of the personnel and organisation of each branch office. This has been a heavy task; and it has meant that more than half of the headquarters staff and resources of the Service have been concentrated on this intensive study of the Communist Party.<sup>182</sup>

Counter-subversion was now at the core of MI5's preoccupations and indeed was understood to directly facilitate the prosecution of their other duties in the fields of counter-espionage and provision of preventative security measures. Proof of this is provided via examination of MI5's restructuring efforts in both 1951 and '53. 1951 saw B Division – formerly counter-espionage – reorganised to focus on communist subversion almost exclusively. B1 group was re-designated 'Subversive Organisations' before being subdivided further across its 60 members of staff into:

'British Communist Party: Organisation, Policy & Membership, Investigation of Communist Party Underground Activities, Prophylactic measures: Industry, Civil Service & Professions, Vetting, International Communism, Subversive and suspect movements other than the Communist Party, Foreign Communists in the UK as well as British Communist Party Foreign Activities'<sup>183</sup>

Such restructuring of B division was necessary in order to manage the 'constantly increasing mass of business (which had to lead to) a crisis in management and a crisis in manpower', which section head John Marriot had bemoaned in 1950. The 1951 reorganisation was therefore an attempt to reallocate the division's resources whilst ensuring that communism remained enshrined at the heart of its priorities. As Marriot laid out, the division's responsibilities were defined as:

'Counter espionage, counter-sabotage and counter-subversion. In practice, these mean defending the realm in peace and war against Russian and satellite activities, in time of peace defending our constitution (which in its widest sense includes our industrial stability) against attempts to overthrow it by subversive means, and in time of war preventing Fifth Column actions of all kinds.'<sup>184</sup>

The reforms of Sir Dick White – successor to Sir Percy Sillitoe as Director General of the Service in 1953 – make the increased centrality of anti-communist counter-subversion even more obvious as counter-communist responsibilities were spun out across four entire divisions. C Division: Protective Security, D Division: Counter- Espionage, E-Division: Counter-Subversion home and overseas and F-Division: Communism – home.<sup>185</sup> In a period of particular financial difficulty – government spending on rearmament was

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<sup>182</sup> Brook Report, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17, p. 5

<sup>183</sup> Note 104a, 'Chart of proposed break-down for B.1. Group', 1<sup>st</sup> May 1951, TNA, KV 4/762

<sup>184</sup> John Marriot, 'Review of B. Division: Aims and Objects', July 1950, TNA, KV 4/762

<sup>185</sup> See Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), Appendix 3, 'Nomenclature and Responsibilities of Security Service Branches/Divisions, 1914-1994'

curtailed significantly at the beginning of 1952 as import prices rose sharply, far outstripping the Treasury's predictions – that so many of MI5's resources were allocated to the problem of communism demonstrates the perceived gravity of the threat.<sup>186</sup> In addition to these reforms, it is interesting to note the promotion of Roger Hollis – later to become DG himself – to the role of Deputy Director General at the same time as White's elevation to DG.<sup>187</sup> As previously discussed, Hollis was a veteran of the old F Division (counter-subversion) and his promotion would seem to clearly indicate that the discipline was now held in high esteem within both the Service and wider government.

### **Impact of further Espionage Scandal**

Whilst much of the theory behind the government's switch to a more proactive model of counter-subversion policy can be traced back to the escalation of the Cold War from 1947 onwards, many of the initial practical arrangements were shaped by discovery of further Soviet espionage. Two cases in particular served to influence the shape of counter-subversive policy in the early 1950s. The first was that of scientist Klaus Fuchs. Fuchs was a British nuclear physicist of German origin, who had been an avowed member of the German Communist Party during the 1920s, before immigrating to Britain in 1933 as a result of the Nazi party's increasingly tight hold over the country.<sup>188</sup> He proceeded to take a PhD at Bristol University and dabbled in communist politics within Britain, before spending a brief period of internment in Canada as a result of his Germanic heritage at the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>189</sup> 1941 saw Fuchs returned to Britain by the government, on account of his scientific expertise, where he joined the research staff of Rudolph Peierls, then engaged on work related to the TUBE ALLOYS British nuclear research project.<sup>190</sup> In 1943, Fuchs was part of the research team from the UK which moved to join US nuclear research efforts, with Fuchs himself assigned to the main atomic research facility at Los Alamos. Following the war's end, Fuchs returned to the UK, whereupon he became head of the theoretical physics division at Britain's nuclear

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<sup>186</sup> George Brennan and Alan Milward, *Britain's Place in the World: Import Controls 1945-60*, (Routledge, London, 2003), p. 147, also Jihang Park, 'Wasted Opportunities? The 1950s Rearmament Programme and the Failure of British Economic Policy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, No. 3, July 1997, pp. 360-362

<sup>187</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 325

<sup>188</sup> 'Fuchs – Membership of the German Communist Party: 1932-1933', MI5 briefing on Fuchs' background, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1949, TNA, KV 2/1248

<sup>189</sup> 'Internment in Canada and Release for Study at Birmingham University', *Ibid.*

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

research unit at Harwell in Oxfordshire.<sup>191</sup> In 1949, on the basis on information decrypted via the VENONA program, GCHQ began to suspect that Fuchs had been passing information to Soviet intelligence throughout all his periods of employment on these various Western nuclear programs. Following an investigation and subsequent interrogation by MI5, Fuchs confessed his involvement in Soviet-sponsored espionage and was sentenced to fourteen years in prison under the Official Secrets Act, his British citizenship stripped from him in the process.<sup>192</sup> Worryingly for British intelligence however, Fuchs' actions were inspired not by material interests, but rather a deep and unwavering commitment to communist ideals. The Security Service report in the wake of the investigation's conclusion noted that:

'The history of Emil Julius Klaus FUCHS is a curious mixture of brilliant scholarship and achievement in the field of scientific research, blind devotion to the doctrines of Communism and cold-blooded treachery to the country which has done most to welcome and reward him... Fuchs was an ideological Communist and became a spy for that reason. He appears to be convinced that he was not recruited but that his actions were the result of his honest belief that by passing information on atomic energy to the Russians he was acting in the highest interests of humanity.'<sup>193</sup>

In many ways the Fuchs case appeared to confirm conclusions drawn from the aftermath of Gouzenko's defection, intellectuals with a predilection for communism presented an excellent opportunity for recruitment by Soviet Intelligence. Such individuals often had a strong chance of exposure to sensitive information due to their wider professional and social connections. Despite MI5's highly successful efforts in documenting CPGB membership since 1948, remarkably little was still known about this class of person. As recorded within the pages of Norman Brook's enquiry:

'[Communist] ideas evidently have a strong appeal to a certain type of intellectual; and scientists and artists, in particular, seem to be especially susceptible to them. It is significant that it was in this class that Fuchs and Pontecorvo were found. There is here an undoubted gap in our knowledge of potential agents for the Russian intelligence service or of people who might be willing, and able, to convey useful information to the Russians.'<sup>194</sup>

The Fuchs case gave further justification for the surveillance and monitoring of academics and scientists with potential communist sympathies across all elements of British society, as the case seemed to indicate that members of the academy were more susceptible to communist sympathies than other members of society. In the eyes of the

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<sup>191</sup> Michael S. Goodman, 'Who is Trying to Keep What Secret from Whom and Why? MI5-FBI Relations and the Klaus Fuchs Case', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, 2005, p.124

<sup>192</sup> Norman Moss, *Klaus Fuchs: the Man who Stole the Atom Bomb*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1987), p. 184

<sup>193</sup> 'The Case of Emil Julius Klaus Fuchs', B.2.b (counter-espionage) report, 1950, TNA, KV 2/1256

<sup>194</sup> Brook Report, March 1951, p. 6, TNA, CAB 301/17

government there was a pressing need for the Security Service to accurately identify those who not only maintained a formal association to communism, but also those who subscribed to its ideological tenants without maintain any overt links to the main communist organisations active within Britain. As put by John Marriot:

‘Since Communists present us with the most serious problem in dealing with the R.I.S. our first responsibility must be to identify as many of them as possible. Positive steps must therefore be taken to collect and record information about all of them, for it should be regarded as just as important to identify convinced Marxists, particularly among educated people, as it is to identify card-holding members of the Communist Party.’<sup>195</sup>

As evidence was provided time and again that adherents to communism placed ideological commitment above either national loyalties or material interest, Whitehall was forced to re-evaluate its counter-subversive approach. Meanwhile, the case of Fuchs clearly demonstrated that the threat posed by Soviet espionage remained, particularly, within the intellectual and educated classes.

Following on from Fuchs, the consequences of failure to disrupt communism’s ideological appeal and recognise its adherents were made clear once again – to humiliating extent - in the wake of the defections of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean. The spring of 1951 saw a breakthrough by British and American cryptanalysts working on the VENONA decryption program. Namely, it was realised that Soviet cypher clerks had reused a number of encryption pads intended for one-time use only – thus allowing for the decryption of a series of NKGB telegrams which provided clear proof that the identity of the Soviet agent Гомеп (Gomer, or Homer when anglicised) – an agent known to British intelligence in at least vague terms since 1941 – was the Foreign Office diplomat Donald Maclean.<sup>196</sup> With concerns raised that VENONA material would not be permissible in court, Maclean was placed under MI5 surveillance until sufficient and legally admissible proof could be acquired in order to obtain a successful prosecution.<sup>197</sup> Unfortunately, news of Maclean’s positive identification also reached fellow Soviet agent Kim Philby – then stationed as the liaison officer for MI6 in Washington – who quickly

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<sup>195</sup> John Marriot, ‘Review of B Division’, July 1950, TNA, KV 4/762

<sup>196</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 423-425

<sup>197</sup> Briefing prepared by Foreign Office regarding preliminary investigation into Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean, November 1955, TNA, FCO 158/177

informed KGB centre in Moscow of the development.<sup>198</sup> With MI5's net closing in and Maclean's behaviour growing steadily more erratic, the decision was reached to exfiltrate him from Britain along with fellow Soviet agent Guy Burgess - whose increasingly self-destructive behaviour had rendered him of little further use to Soviet intelligence.<sup>199</sup> On the 25<sup>th</sup> May 1951, after MI5's surveillance team had finished their shift (as a result of budgetary restraints – the Security Service had a mere 20 full-time surveillance officers in 1951)<sup>200</sup> the pair boarded a ferry at Southampton bound for the French coast, before making their way across the continent to eventually reach sanctuary in Moscow.<sup>201</sup> Although it was not immediately clear to British intelligence that the pair had definitely defected – Burgess & Maclean would not make a public appearance in Moscow until 1956 – by March 1952 the Security Service strongly suspected that the pair had been aided in their escape 'by the Russian Intelligence Service and that they are now under the control of the Soviet Authorities.'<sup>202</sup>

The incident provoked crisis across the British government –it now appeared that at least two Soviet agents had been active within some of the most sensitive areas of the British State and moreover had been directly involved with intelligence liaison between Britain and the United States. Moreover, as the facts regarding the pair's political development and subsequent recruitment by Soviet intelligence slowly became known, the case seemed to provide historical justification for an increased focus on countering communism's ideological appeal. The scale of the pair's betrayal seemed scarcely comprehensible in the immediate aftermath of their flight. The extent of Liddell's confusion in particular – who had been friends with Burgess - was clearly evident within his diary entry for the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1951:

'I find it difficult to imagine BURGESS as a Comintern agent or an espionage agent in the ordinary accepted interpretation of these terms. He certainly had been Marxian and, up to a point, an apologist for the Russian regime, and would have been capable of discussing in a highly indiscreet manner with anybody almost anything that he got from official sources. He would have done this out of sheer political enthusiasm without any regard for security.'<sup>203</sup>

It seemed scarcely believable that individuals such as Burgess and Maclean would betray all they had worked for to a foreign power in the name of ideology. Both products of what

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<sup>198</sup> Kim Philby, *My Silent War*, (Panther Books, London, 1983), p. 201

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Lownie, *Stalin's Englishman*, pp. 230-231

<sup>200</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 425

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, p. 426

<sup>202</sup> Report of the Cadogan Committee of Enquiry, June 1952, TNA, CAB 301/120, p. 6

<sup>203</sup> Guy Liddell, Diary Entry, 27<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, KV, 4/473

*Spectator* journalist Henry Fairlie would in 1955 term ‘The Establishment’, Burgess and Maclean seemed to typify a certain fundamental ‘Englishness’ which had been thought to be unshakeable.<sup>204</sup> Certainly it had not been thought that exposure to communism at a previous point in one’s life could cause an individual to become so intoxicated by the idea that they would rather act out of an abstract loyalty to ideology rather than national sentiment. As the 1955 FO report on the issue noted:

‘If the statements about his [Maclean’s] Communist sympathies were made after his disappearance in 1951 had been made at the time, it is unlikely that very much attention would have been paid to them. The stories would undoubtedly have been dismissed as indicating youthful indiscretions of the kind which were common enough among undergraduates of that period.’<sup>205</sup>

Arguably, the problem of Soviet espionage had been somewhat distant for British intelligence until 1951. Although there had been previous instances of communist governmental infiltration detected, these were always at an arm’s length from the Security Service and SIS. For example, Nunn-May had been an academic, whilst Fuchs, as a naturalised British citizen, could not be expected to show the same loyalty to King and Country as expected of a native-born subject. By contrast, both Burgess and Maclean had been directly employed in various roles in the business of national security and had struck up friendships and acquaintances throughout the British secret state. With their defection it became chillingly apparent that communism really could trump national loyalty, even of those directly involved in the running of the state. As a result, the necessity of positive vetting (conducting background checks against a set of criteria) became very much apparent. The caveat given by Attlee in 1948 on the enactment of negative vetting (checking an individual’s history back against pre-existing Security Service records) now seemed hopelessly naïve, if well intentioned:

‘I should emphasise that this action is being taken solely on security grounds. The State is not concerned with the political views, as such, of its servants, and as far as possible alternative employment on the wider range of non-secret Government work be found for those who are deemed for the reason indicated to be unsuited for secret work.’<sup>206</sup>

The actions of Burgess and Maclean meant that the State was now very definitely interested in the political views of its servants. The pair’s defection seemed to demonstrate that the loyalty of the communist was not a conflicted one – communism

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<sup>204</sup> Henry Fairlie, ‘Political Commentary’, *The Spectator*, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1955, see also Andrew Lownie, *Stalin’s Englishman: The Lives of Guy Burgess*, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2015), pp. 1-50

<sup>205</sup> Foreign Office briefing on ‘Previous Histories of Maclean and Burgess’, November 6<sup>th</sup> 1955, TNA, FCO 158/177, p.1

<sup>206</sup> Clement Attlee, Statement to the House of Commons, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1948, Hansard Vol. 448, cc1703-8



would eventually win out. Though positive vetting had been introduced in early 1951, mainly as a result of the Fuchs case, it was initially extremely limited in its application – the procedure's very existence was classified until 1952, whilst it was only applied to some 1000 staff in its first year.<sup>207</sup> It took the shock of the Burgess and Maclean defections to significantly increase the number of public servants covered by positive vetting. 1952 saw the FO convene the Cadogan board of enquiry, to contemplate what alterations to security would be required to prevent a repeat incident. As pointed out by the committee, negative vetting standards would have done little to guard against individuals such as Burgess and Maclean. The behaviour of neither had warranted investigation by the police or Security Service prior to their defection, (Maclean's erratic behaviour in Cairo in 1950 during which he had broken a fellow civil servant's leg in a bout of drunken rage, whilst Burgess' fits of intoxication had been explained away as the result of stress and overwork)<sup>208</sup> and as such there were no files to refer back against. Attlee's reforms had clearly not gone far enough and it was recommended that positive vetting be extended across the diplomatic service as well as into senior management. By 1954 positive vetting had been extended to all those engaged in consistent 'exceptionally secret work', with the number of individuals covered by such a provision rising to an estimated 10'000 people, not including those employed in atomic research.<sup>209</sup> This is not to say the procedure was any less controversial than its predecessor had been. Criticism was again prevalent in the Security Service, typified by Director General Roger Hollis' comment that:

'The secrecy of one's employment influences one's private life, I doubt if any of us who have spent a number of years in the Security Service could produce referees whose testimonial would be really valuable. I am sure I could not and I should not like to ask my friends to act as referees in a matter of this importance because I do not think it would be fair to them...'<sup>210</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such reservations, the positive vetting system was adopted and standardised across government in a remarkably short space of time.<sup>211</sup> The speed and scope of the transition was significant. It was only six years since the government had very tentatively adopted the minor (by modern standards) provisions of negative vetting. These alone had provoked considerable criticism within Whitehall as being overly draconian and had threatened to overwhelm the Security Service with additional work.

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<sup>207</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State*, (Allen Lane, London, 2010), p. 125

<sup>208</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, pp. 421-423

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 393

<sup>210</sup> Roger Hollis, 1954, op cit. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p.396

<sup>211</sup> Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 102

Moreover, by committing to expanding positive vetting wholesale across the Civil Service (curiously the Armed Forces would only be subjected to the same procedure beginning in Dec 1953)<sup>212</sup>, the government also by proxy committed to a significant increase in security spending and the size of MI5. No small thing when Britain's precarious economic circumstances in the early '50s are considered. Churchill's newly elected government entered power in October 1951 with the express intent of slashing public spending. The new Chancellor of the Exchequer, RAB Butler, cut £160 million from food subsidies alone in his first budget,<sup>213</sup> whilst such was the anxiety over the UK's worsening balance of payments that the winter of 1951 had nearly seen the floatation of the pound under the Treasury's infamous operation ROBOT plan.<sup>214</sup> Burgess and Maclean's defections provided the catalyst for the escalation of defensive security procedures. Without the grave shock caused as a result of the incident, it seems unlikely that the Churchill government would have countenanced the expansion of vetting measures to such a significant extent.

Further espionage scandal, in the form of the Fuchs, Burgess and Maclean affairs therefore had two immediate practical implications for counter-subversion policy. As a result of the Fuchs case, official attention was turned more heavily towards the question of communism within the sciences and academia. Meanwhile, as a result of Burgess and Maclean further vetting reform was accelerated – leading to the enactment of positive vetting far more quickly than would otherwise have been the case.

### **Restructuring of Cabinet Office Machinery**

The aftermath of Burgess and Maclean's defection had immediate implications for the Cabinet Office machinery which oversaw Whitehall's domestic counter-subversive campaign. The affair provided the catalyst for finally moving beyond the strictly defensive approach which had been the model for the vast majority of the Attlee government. October 1951 saw Norman Brook write to Air Chief Marshal Sir William Elliot – at the time stationed in Washington as the UK's chief representative to NATO – who had been under significant pressure from Walter Bedell-Smith, then Director of the US Central Intelligence Agency:

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, p. 103

<sup>213</sup> David Kynaston, *Family Britain: 1951-57*, (Bloomsbury, London, 2007), pp. 73-74

<sup>214</sup> P. Burnham, *Remaking the Post-war World Economy: Robot and British Policy in the 1950s*, (Springer Publishing, New York, 2003), pp. 3-4

‘Within the last few months the Government have agreed in principle that some positive steps should be taken to counter the activities of Communism in this country and that, within limits, Government agencies may be used for this purpose as well as the political instruments of the Labour Party and the trade unions... We contemplate that this policy will take shape mainly in information activities of various forms, mainly covert. The Committee is not precluded from considering suggestions for other types of action; but it is likely to concentrate, in the first instance at any rate, on measures for indoctrinating various sections of the community (e.g. industrial workers, members of the Armed Forces, students) against Soviet or Soviet inspired propaganda.’<sup>215</sup>

The repercussions of the Burgess and Maclean defections, in conjunction with conclusions drawn following the discovery of Fuch’s treachery finally convinced the Attlee government in its final months that a more proactive policy was required. Where previously more active measures had been resisted, in May 1951 a domestic counterpart to the Cabinet Committee on Communism (Overseas) was approved ‘to keep a continuing watch on the Communist threat to national security’ in the United Kingdom.<sup>216</sup> Headed by Norman Brook continuously from its founding,<sup>217</sup> the Committee on Communism (Home) (hereafter also referred to by its official acronym of AC (H)) formed the central body for the formulation of counter-communist policy within the United Kingdom. Though similar in name to the Ministerial Committee on Communism, formed and headed by Attlee in 1949, the AC (H) was distinct in so far as its terms of reference were explicitly designed to denote a wholly domestic remit:

‘To focus all available intelligence about Communist activities in the United Kingdom... To give any necessary guidance on administrative and policy questions to the briefing group of Information Officers handling anti-Communist information material in the United Kingdom... To co-ordinate any anti-Communist activities in this country which may be approved by Ministers.’<sup>218</sup>

The AC (M) by contrast functioned more as a Prime Ministerial oversight body and was convened with the purpose of exercising ‘general supervision over matters of major policy which arise in connection with the conduct of anti-Communist activity’.<sup>219</sup> The aims of the new committee, meanwhile, were very similar to those proposed by the AC (O) in mid-1950:

‘(i) To ensure that, following on their defeat at the recent election, the Communists should never be allowed to increase their political strength as to be able to claim the right to form a Government. (ii) To counter Communist influence in such bodies as the Trade Unions, Youth Organisations, the teaching professions etc. (iii) To detach from the Communist Party its intellectual-emotional type of adherent. (iv)

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<sup>215</sup> Sir Norman Brook to Sir William Elliot, 11<sup>th</sup> October 1951, TNA, CAB 301/120

<sup>216</sup> Comments regarding the memorandum ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’ (produced by the AC (O)), as discussed at meeting of the AC (M), 6<sup>th</sup> February 1951, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>217</sup> Permanent representation on the Committee was provided by the Foreign Office, Home Office, Ministry of Labour, Treasury, Ministry of Defence and Security Service. Other governmental bodies, most notably the JIC, were also represented intermittently.

<sup>218</sup> ‘Composition and Terms of Reference of the Committee’, AC (H), 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, CAB, TNA 134/737

<sup>219</sup> ‘Composition and Terms of Reference’, AC (M), 31<sup>st</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 134/2

To expose various “rackets” promoted by the Communists which are not necessarily themselves connected the Communist ideology.’<sup>220</sup>

It was these same subjects which formed the basis for the AC (H)’s initial discussions.<sup>221</sup>

It follows, therefore, that the establishment of the AC (H) represented the successful culmination of lobbying by the AC (O) which had begun in 1949. Finally, twenty four months later, machinery had been created which would allow, in theory, Ministers to direct and monitor a cohesive and multi-faceted campaign against British communism. As an aside, unfortunately, certain proposals of the AC (M) and AC (O) were not carried forward by the new committee. At a meeting of the AC (M) in February 1951 it was speculated by the committee that ‘ridicule might well prove a most potent weapon’ against communism.<sup>222</sup> This seemingly sensible idea was not considered further by the AC (H):

‘MR. NICHOLLS said that he had been considering the possibility of approaching Mr. Edwards [presumably Jimmy Edwards – a favourite of the 1950s variety act scene] or some other comedian with a view to their introducing anti-communist themes into their programmes on the B.B.C. He recognised that in doing so there might be some danger that the atmosphere of good humour engendered by these comedians would attach to their victims as well and make people think that the communists were ludicrous rather than vicious... There was a danger that the use of the B.B.C. for this purpose might eventually be traced back to the Committee and that the Russians themselves, by employing the technique of humour to make palatable certain unpalatable measures, had regarded humour as reacting in their favour.’<sup>223</sup>

Sadly the dealings of the AC (H) remained relatively dry affairs as Ministers reached exactly the wrong conclusions about the utility of humour in the fight against communism – as proven some 25 years later by the likes of *Citizen Smith*.

The actual running of the committee was delegated to Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook (initially, Herbert Morrison had hoped to eventually preside over the AC (H), however this was obviously precluded by Labour’s electoral defeat later in 1951).<sup>224</sup> This was a marked change from the previous system under which Attlee had very clearly taken a highly active role in directing anti-communist activities. Interestingly, this arrangement remained unchanged following Churchill’s re-election in October 1951. In spite of his reputation as an avid consumer of secret intelligence, Churchill exhibited little of Attlee’s

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<sup>220</sup> ‘Possible Anti-Communist Activities at Home’, Discussion of the AC (O), 24<sup>th</sup> August 1950, TNA, CAB 134/4

<sup>221</sup> Contents of minutes of meetings of the AC (H), TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>222</sup> Minutes from discussion of the AC (M), 6<sup>th</sup> February 1951, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>223</sup> ‘Satire as an Anti-Communist Weapon’, as discussed at meeting of the AC (H), 24<sup>th</sup> March 1952, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>224</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’, memorandum by Herbert Morrison, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1951, TNA, CAB 134/2

desire to personally oversee domestic counter-subversion measures. Indeed, he was notable only by his absence when it came to the activities of the AC (H).<sup>225</sup> Whilst he became occasionally exercised by some of the CPGB's more aggressive pronouncements,<sup>226</sup> Churchill left the actual running of domestic anti-communist activities to his deputies, a system which would persist throughout the years of Conservative hegemony. Though he remained an enthusiastic proponent of secret operations overseas - most notably personally overseeing 1953's Operation BOOT, which secured the overthrow of Mohammed Mossadeq as Prime Minister of Iran – he displayed little interest in domestic affairs.<sup>227</sup> Meanwhile, that Brook remained in the role of Chair of the AC (H) demonstrates the level of consensus that existed between the two governments regarding national security matters. Whilst considerable differences of opinion - particularly on economic matters - existed elsewhere between the Attlee and Churchill administrations, with regards to domestic security policy the governments remained largely in agreement. As such, the trajectory of domestic anti-communist measures continued in large part to be defined by the legacy of the Attlee government. Both the theory and bureaucratic machinery of domestic counter-subversive policy had been conceptualised by the time Churchill returned to office. The new Conservative government chose to build upon Attlee's domestic security reforms, rather than discard them out of hand.

The Burgess and Maclean cases finally forced the Attlee government to alter Cabinet Office machinery so as to facilitate a more proactive counter-subversive strategy. This altered strategy was then accepted without question by the incoming Churchill government – indicating consensus between the conclusions of the two administrations regarding domestic subversion.

### **Initial Counter-Propaganda Efforts**

The effective countering of communism on ideological grounds presented difficulties however. Similar to initial counter-subversion efforts there was an immediate mismatch between intent and capability. It was the question of how to overcome this problem which directly accounted for IRD's growth in responsibility and influence over the early '50s.

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<sup>225</sup> No mention of Churchill attending any meeting of the AC (H) during his time in office, see files TNA, CAB 134/737 to CAB 134/740, see also David Stafford, *Churchill and Secret Service*, (Abacus, London, 2001), pp. 384-385

<sup>226</sup> Peter Hennessy, *Having it So Good: Britain in the Fifties*, (Penguin Books, London, 2007), p. 172

<sup>227</sup> Aldrich & Cormac, *The Black Door*, (William Collins, London, 2016), pp. 173-177

The parameters of what was required to fill the gap in capability were set out at the AC (H)'s second meeting:

'It was generally agreed that there exists a case for establishing machinery which would serve as a focus for all intelligence about the activities of the Communists in this country, not only among the workers but among the other groups of the population as well. The organisation set up for this purpose should be designed to extract all the relevant intelligence from the Departments concerned and to arrange for its issue in the form and through the channels most appropriate to each of the population groups.'<sup>228</sup>

Such a role had already been performed on an ad-hoc basis by the IRD since 1948.

Certainly the preceding years had proven IRD's worth as a propaganda outfit - the Department counted the Parliamentary Labour Party, Conservative Central Office, TUC, Church of England Council on Foreign Relations and United Nations Association (amongst others) amongst its clientele by 1951.<sup>229</sup> Meanwhile, crucially, IRD's activities had remained covert throughout that time. There existed little appetite within government for an overt campaign of counter-propaganda, particularly as open efforts were felt to possess the potential to achieve more harm than good. As had been pointed out by Percy Sillitoe in June 1950:

'Sir Percy Sillitoe thought that more harm than good would be done by an "exposure" of the Communist Peace Propaganda Campaign. This campaign had had very little success in this country... To launch a big attack on this campaign would therefore give it just that publicity which was its main need.'<sup>230</sup>

IRD's clandestine nature was thus seen by officials as a highly desirable trait.

Furthermore, as the members of the AC (H) went on to note, it was a far more straightforward matter for the government to simply create a formal 'Home Desk' within the Department than go to the trouble and expense of founding an entirely new organisation. As discussed at the second meeting of the AC (H):

'It was noted that the Foreign Office already had, in its Information Research Department, an organisation which was serving the same ends for overseas information and which had, in the course of its work, accumulated a large fund of material and expertise on the general pattern and methods of Communist penetration. It was generally felt, therefore, that the best use could be made of this experience if, instead of setting up a separate organisation to deal with indoctrination against Communism at home, a "Home Desk" was added to the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office to act as the focus for the collation and dissemination of intelligence about Communist activities on the home front. In the first place this "Home Desk" could be manned by the addition of two men to the IRD...'<sup>231</sup>

The granting of a formal domestic remit to the Information Research Department was a highly significant moment in the development of British counter-subversion policy.

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<sup>228</sup> Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>229</sup> 'Countering Communism', Foreign Office memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>230</sup> Minutes of meeting of the AC (O), 20<sup>th</sup> June 1950, TNA, CAB 134/4

<sup>231</sup> Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

Although as previously noted, IRD had operated within Britain on an ad-hoc basis since 1949, the report by the AC (H) on 'Countering Communism' in 1951 marked the first instance of the government incorporating a formalised domestic counter-propaganda campaign as part of its approach to domestic communism.<sup>232</sup> Initial success was limited. Whilst the IRD was proficient at generating substantial amounts of anti-communist grey propaganda, effective dissemination proved a consistent problem. Although the IRD had long possessed the means to collaborate with highly centralised bodies such as the TUC,<sup>233</sup> it struggled to obtain notice amongst more localised groups. Information intended for local trade union branches and other groups of regional influence – including parish clergy – was often lost amongst the more mundane paperwork that such groups received on a regular basis, to the deep frustration of the government.<sup>234</sup> The original goal behind IRD's incorporation into Whitehall's domestic counter-subversion strategy – namely securing a means through which to covertly disseminate anti-communist literature on a wide scale – continued to elude Ministers. The AC (H) reported in 1953 that:

'There was evidence that there were a considerable number of people in the provinces with a strong potential influence on public opinion, who were anxious to help in countering Communist propaganda, but who at present lacked the necessary ammunition in the form of facts and figures.'<sup>235</sup>

When quantified, the circulation rates for IRD's self-published domestic output was relatively small. For 1953 *The Interpreter*, IRD's most widely read publication, reached only 204 individuals per month – whilst the 'British Answers to Communism' pamphlet had a grand total of 9 readers and 'The Monthly Summary of Communist Activities in the United Kingdom' achieved a circulation of only 10.<sup>236</sup> Whilst IRD's readership were undoubtedly influential - 'The Monthly Summary' was circulated to Clement Attlee & Herbert Morrison as well as Arthur Deakin, General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union – they were typically already predisposed to the IRD's line of argument, whilst publications were not achieving anywhere near high enough circulation rates to effect general opinion in any meaningful way.<sup>237</sup> Greater success was experienced

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<sup>232</sup> Anti-communist counter-propaganda efforts had been ongoing since the war, Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda 1945-53*, (Routledge, London, 2004), pp. 26-53

<sup>233</sup> Anthony Carew, 'The Schism within the World Federation of Trade Unions: Government and Trade-Union Diplomacy', *International Review of Social History*, Vol. 29 Issue 3, December 1984, pp. 298-299

<sup>234</sup> 'Dissemination in the United Kingdom of Information to Counter Communism', discussion from minutes of AC (H), 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of 1953, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> 'Proposal for an "International Information and Research Centre"' Foreign Office memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

when the Home Desk collaborated with those domestic journalistic contacts which the wider IRD had cultivated over the preceding three years. W.N. Ewer of the *Daily Herald* proved an enthusiastic ally as did the *Daily Telegraph*'s industrial correspondent Hugh Chevins.<sup>238</sup> The Labour Party's central office was also extremely co-operative, extensive links between IRD and the Party had been forged during Labour's time in power thanks to the efforts of Denis Healey and these continued even after electoral defeat in 1951.<sup>239</sup>

Nonetheless, whilst individual articles could be disseminated through IRD's stable of journalistic and political contacts, the means to improve circulation rates of longer publications continued to elude the Department. Somewhat ironically, the solution initially offered was essentially the founding of a government front organisation – composed of a small executive committee, which would have knowledge of IRD's influence on the organisation, and a larger general staff responsible for the dissemination of material, though crucially with no knowledge of their publications' exact provenance.<sup>240</sup> It is interesting to note that as counter-subversion policy turned increasingly to active measures, many proposed counter-measures effectively mirrored communist practices and techniques. The solution in the end was something of a (perhaps typical) governmental fudge. Both the Home Office and Sir Norman Brook raised concerns that control over such an organisation would be fraught at best – Cabinet oversight would be difficult to maintain – whilst the political damage if such a group's origins were to be discovered was deemed too great to be acceptable.<sup>241</sup> However, were a suitable individual found who would be willing to set up such an organisation without the assistance of official subsidy there was no particular reason why IRD could not assist the new group by providing material and contact to subscribers.<sup>242</sup> The formal proposal which followed the discussion recorded that 'Tentative soundings, made without committing I.R.D. to an interest in the project' were made under the 'pledge of strictest secrecy' to Sir Desmond Morton - Churchill's former personal assistant, recently retired, and as such, without official connection to government – who provisionally consented to

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<sup>238</sup> John Jenks, *British Propaganda and News Media in the Cold War*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 82-83. Interestingly, Ewer was himself a former communist and probable Soviet agent. See Kevin Quinlan, *The Secret War between the Wars, MI5 in the 1920s and 30s*, (Boydell & Brewer, London, 2014), p. 215, footnote 106.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid. p. 105

<sup>240</sup> 'Dissemination in the United Kingdom of Information to Counter Communism', AC (H) 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of 1953, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> 'Proposal for an "International Information and Research Centre"' Foreign Office memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738



act as the organiser for such a group.<sup>243</sup> Unfortunately after the proposal was submitted Sir Norman Brook, acting in his capacity of Chair of the AC (H), ruled that future discussion should ‘not be formally considered by any Cabinet Committee, nor should they be linked to the recent discussion of the Committee’s work by the Defence Committee’<sup>244</sup> making it difficult to ascertain what happened in the aftermath. Gill Bennett in her 2007 biography of Morton argues that the AC (H) simply considered the plan too risky, which seems highly plausible, however this is never stated outright in the files available.<sup>245</sup> Regardless of the reasons for its abandonment, the fact that discussion of the ‘International Information and Research Centre’ appears to cease post-July 1953 would seem to indicate that the idea was not pursued to fruition.

Nevertheless, despite the initial proposal’s failure, it is possible to infer from the progress report furnished to the AC (H) regarding IRD’s English section in March 1954 that the problem of distribution was still solved rapidly by other means. The report makes note that:

‘The salient features of the activities of English Section in disseminating knowledge of the aims and methods of Communism at home are: i) a good range of contacts with the national daily press and some of the provincial newspapers; ii) increased contacts with the national weekly press; iii) increasing interest in IRD material on the part of Labour and trade union leaders.’<sup>246</sup>

The implication was that by 1954 problems with distribution had been resolved to a satisfactory extent. Circulation of *The Interpreter* in particular had risen to over 300 copies domestically per month, which were circulated throughout the major unions, political organisations and socially influential groups (for example the Church of England).<sup>247</sup> Beyond distribution, it was assessed that future trends more widely also appeared stable, with no major changes to policy recommended. The only drawback that was highlighted by the report was a lack of progress within certain trade unions.<sup>248</sup> Namely: communist influence within engineering, shipbuilding, vehicle production and construction unions remained significant, with no apparent solution offered by the IRD.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> ‘Dissemination in the United Kingdom of Information to Counter Communism’, AC (H) 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of 1953, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>244</sup> Sir Norman Brook to the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AC (H) for 1953, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>245</sup> See Gill Bennett, *Churchill’s Man of Mystery: Desmond Morton and the World of Intelligence*, (Routledge, London, 2007), p. 309

<sup>246</sup> ‘Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office’, IRD memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

<sup>247</sup> Jenks, *British Propaganda*, p. 68

<sup>248</sup> ‘Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office’, IRD memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

Herein lay the fundamental weakness of what has been termed the ‘state-private’ network (covert government liaison with private entities) approach to counter-subversion typified by the IRD’s anti-communist propaganda campaign.<sup>250</sup> Countering communist influence within the trade unions was often reliant upon continued co-operation with individual union leadership. However propaganda, even that as artfully designed as the material produced by the IRD, could only influence opinion so far. When confronted by unions temperamentally predisposed to militant action, the British government had little by way of effective counter-subversion options to manage the situation.

### **Counter-Subversion in Industry**

IRD was not the only government department to encounter difficulties in dealing with communism within Britain’s trade unions. Communist influence over the unions proved a constant worry for Whitehall more widely, both during the latter months of the Attlee government and throughout the second Churchill administration. Contrary to understandings formed in the late 1940s (which concluded that the educated bourgeoisie was the group from which the principle communist threat emanated), communism within industry was increasingly viewed as an equal, if not greater threat as the ‘50s wore on. Evidence of the change in attitude first began to appear in earnest from 1951. Sir Robert Gould, then Minister for Labour, stated plainly at the first meeting of the AC (H) in the June of that year that ‘Of all the classes... the workers were the most important. They were the object of special attack by the Communists, and our counter-attack must be based on showing them how they have been misled by the Communists for their own ends.’<sup>251</sup> Of course the government had long understood that links existed between domestic communism and organised labour. The CPGB had long sought to exploit working class grievance for political gain, as it regularly and openly affirmed. The CPGB’s political programme *The British Road to Socialism*, first published in February 1951 proclaiming that:

‘The essential condition for establishing such a People’s power [a communist Britain] is the building up of a broad coalition or popular alliance of all sections of the working people: of the organised working class, or all workers by hand and brain... Because of this, working class unity, the united action of all sections of the working class movement – Labour, Trade Union, Co-operative and Communist – is the vital need... A People’s Parliament and Government which draws its strength and purpose from a united movement of the

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<sup>250</sup> The term ‘state-private network’ first used by Scott Lucas in reference to CIA operations in Europe. See Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The US Crusade against the Soviet Union, 1945-56*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1999)

<sup>251</sup> Sir Robert Gould to first meeting of the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

people with the working class at its core, will be able to mobilise the overwhelming majority of the people for its decisive measures to break the economic and political power of the big exploiters.’<sup>252</sup>

Where previously, in the immediate post-war period these links had not been seen as cause for immediate concern, the situation had changed. In part the shift in attitude can be attributed to heavy industry’s renewed central importance to national security, as the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 and early 1951’s commitment to an ambitious rearmament program following American pressure pushed industrial production back towards the top of the governmental priorities.<sup>253</sup> Meanwhile, though industrial concern was in part brought about by the outbreak of the Korean War, official worry persisted long past the conflict’s conclusion in July 1953. Partially, the government worried that the increased economic burden rearmament brought may present opportunities for the growth of communist influence:

‘If public opinion in this country does not fully understand the reasons for our defence programme, and the sacrifices it entails, it may find it difficult to maintain the firm and enlightened attitude and the stout-heartedness which will be needed in the dangerous years ahead.’<sup>254</sup>

Certainly following the decision to re-arm, CPGB attempts to forment industrial unrest in war-critical industries increased markedly, much to the discomfort of Whitehall officials.<sup>255</sup> The larger reason for increased concern however can be traced to the CPGB’s failure as a political party. By the election of the Churchill government, the British Communist Party had ceased to offer any sort of viable political alternative within Westminster.<sup>256</sup> The 1950 general election saw both of the Party’s sitting MPs unseated, whilst 1951 brought electoral disaster as the CPGB’s share of the vote plummeted from roughly 92,000 in 1950 (this total in of itself a not insignificant decrease from the 98,000 votes carried in 1945) to a meagre total of only 22,000.<sup>257</sup> Matters for the Party were meanwhile made worse as it duly lost some 98% of its electoral deposit on account of failing to garner enough votes even to meet the minimum mandated threshold.<sup>258</sup> Due to electoral collapse, the CPGB seemed unlikely to be able to affect change unilaterally.

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<sup>252</sup> ‘British Road to Socialism’, 1951 version, p. 15, Communist Party of Great Britain Archive, CP/CENT/COMM/01/01

<sup>253</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *Labour in Power*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1985), pp 432-433

<sup>254</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’, memorandum from the AC (O) to the AC (M), 19<sup>th</sup> January 1951, TNA, CAB 134/2

<sup>255</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’, memorandum by the AC (O)’s Overseas Planning Section, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1950, TNA, CAB 21/2750

<sup>256</sup> Noreen Branson, *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain Vol 4, 1941-1951*, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1997), 238-239

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207

<sup>258</sup> Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause: British Communism 1920-1991*, (Pluto Press, London, 1992), p.90

This conclusion was strengthened via an examination of the Party's finances. Whilst the Party presented a public image of success and prosperity, following closer inspection the rapidly worsening state of its financial situation was laid bare. Signs that the Party were struggling financially were evident from 1951, as noted by Guy Liddell:

'The weekend circulation of the 'Daily Worker', which some years back had been as high as 120'000, was now 52'000, and there were likewise falls in the circulation of 'World News and Views', 'Communist Review', 'Woman Today' and 'Challenge'. This was possibly due to the increased cost. Constant appeals were being made by the Communist Press for financial support, but, in spite of an apparent deficit, its organs continued to appear. It was difficult to say how far the deficit was made good by certain wealthy supporters of Communist Party activity or from outside sources.'<sup>259</sup>

By May 1953 an agreement had been reached between the Foreign Office and Board of Trade that a member of the Board of Trade would act as a liaison officer between the Board, FO and Information Research Department – passing on relevant trade information related to the CPGB's commercial activities.<sup>260</sup> At the same point, a major study was commissioned by the AC (H) into the state of British communist finances. The working party - which was comprised of representatives from the Foreign Office, Home Office, Ministry of Labour, Board of Trade, Treasury and Security Service – proceeded to compile over the next two years the most detailed investigation into communist finances undertaken up to that point. The report, presented to the AC (H) in June 1955, shortly after the 1955 general election,<sup>261</sup> showed that the CPGB had essentially been living on borrowed time since the end of the Second World War – whilst it had maintained solvency through the use of savings acquired during the War (the high point of its popularity) as well as the pruning of its administrative staff – by 1955 only a quarter of its typical expenditure was met by routine income, meaning that the Party was almost wholly reliant on donations and bequests from its more affluent members.<sup>262</sup> Interestingly, there was little evidence to suggest foreign funding – unlike the continental communist parties by the 1950s the CPGB did not draw directly upon international organisations or mutual aid funds run by the international peace movement.<sup>263</sup> Whilst this meant that little punitive action could be taken against the Party – its various investments and savings were all entirely legitimate and its tax record immaculate - there was at least comfort to

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<sup>259</sup> Diary entry of Guy Liddell, 15<sup>th</sup> January 1952, TNA, KV 4/474

<sup>260</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 4<sup>th</sup> May 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>261</sup> Winston Churchill resigned as Prime Minister in April 1955, to be succeeded by his Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden. Eden almost immediately called a general election to secure his legitimacy, increasing the Conservative majority to a comfortable sixty seats in the process.

<sup>262</sup> 'Report of a Working Party on Communist Finances', as circulated to the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> June 1955, TNA, CAB 134/740

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

be had in that the CPGB was steadily running itself into the ground. By 1955, circulation of the *Daily Worker* had dropped from three to two editions a week, whilst most expenditure increasingly only just met the running costs for each district, thereby meaning that there were little spare funds for propaganda efforts.<sup>264</sup>

With advancement through politics now effectively denied Whitehall assessed, reasonably, that the most viable path left for the CPGB would be to turn to increased agitation within industry in an attempt to build an alternative base of support. As assessed by the Ministry of Labour:

‘Communist participation in political life in Britain has never had much success and the Party is now a negligible political force... Having failed to make much progress in politics the Communists now look to the field of labour and industry as the best place for making their greatest efforts’.<sup>265</sup>

Chief amongst governmental concerns was not that any great pro-communist sentiment existed amongst the working classes. Rather, the evidence available suggested that communist success tended to be engendered via the exploitation of pre-existing union grievance, rather than any particular affection for communism amongst the working class. The MI5 report on the 1954 dock strikes (which had paralysed traffic at the Port of London, before spreading to Liverpool and Birkenhead)<sup>266</sup> illustrates this point well:

‘It is always difficult to disentangle the causes of a strike and more so to apportion accurately between them the burden of responsibility... Neither on the national level nor through any of its subsidiary formations, including the Port of London branch to which most Communist dockers belong, did the Communist Party plan or inspire the strike... The Party did not make a single recruit amongst London dock workers either during or after the strike... (The Party again has shown) its tendency to delay too long before intervening in a dispute already started; and then to rush in, badly-informed and ill-prepared.’<sup>267</sup>

Rather, official fears were concentrated around the possibility that general apathy amongst the rank and file of Britain’s trade unions could allow committed communists to covertly ascend to positions of influence within union leadership. This theory chimed with Foreign Office analyses of communist tactics performed in 1951. As argued by the FO, the communist threat to national stability ultimately stemmed from communist exploitation of vulnerable groups, without whom the domestic communist movement would be defanged and reduced to a mere nuisance:

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> ‘The Communists and the Trade Unions’, memorandum by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, as circulated to the AC (H), 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1952, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>266</sup> Statement of Sir Walter Monckton (Minister for Labour) to the House of Commons, 19<sup>th</sup> October 1954, Hansard, Vol. 531, cc1035-7

<sup>267</sup> ‘The British Communist Party and the Docks Strike September/October, 1954’, Security Service memorandum circulated at meeting of the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> December 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

‘Communist parties are not designed to create revolutionary situations directly. They are to work upon the masses through what Stalin calls “transmission belts” or “levers”; that is to say, through any ostensibly or actually non-Communist mass movements whose aims can be exploited to create in the popular mind misgivings about policy contrary to that of the Soviet Union... The Communist parties cannot directly achieve very much, and they were in fact explicitly designed by Lenin and Stalin to operate indirectly; their function is to lead public opinion via any local mass movement or agitation that they can exploit, to an acceptance of the Soviet thesis.’<sup>268</sup>

The Labour movement seemed to offer a ready-made group for the Communist Party to exploit. Certainly quantitative analysis supported the plausibility of this hypothesis – by 1954 Foreign Office estimates placed the total proportion of communists within the trade unions at only 0.3%. Within the Executive Council of the Electrical Trades Union (one of the most heavily communist influenced unions, as will be discussed in the following chapters) however the proportion of communists stood at 57% and communist sympathisers at 21%.<sup>269</sup> For the government the problems presented by this were twofold. First and perhaps most obviously, it was felt that the presence of communists within union leadership would necessarily lead to increased militancy and greater tension in union relations overall.<sup>270</sup> More importantly however, communist influence over trade union leadership had the potential to severely weaken official capacity for counter-subversion efforts within industry - as it was this same leadership which was viewed as vital for broader governmental influence over the political trajectory of the working classes. As put by the Ministry of Labour:

‘Trade Union opinion is extremely sensitive towards any semblance of a threat to its complete freedom and independence. Intervention by the Government, however mild in form or benevolent in intention, would set up violent reactions in the Trade Unions, even in those which have pursued the most strongly anti-Communist policy. It is easy to guess at the political capital which could be made if it became known that the Government was passing information or advice to one section of the Trade Union movement to use against another section of the movement... This is the kind of situation which the Communists like to create, by identifying an attack on Communism as an attack on Trade Unionism, and great care must always be used to avoid playing into their hands.’<sup>271</sup>

A long tradition of fiercely defended union independence meant that Whitehall’s ability to interfere directly in matters of industry was severely curtailed. Such was the degree of sensitivity that even extending vetting measures into the more sensitive areas of industry was deemed an impossibility. Even in those areas where private contractors were employed by the government on matters directly related to national security – most

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<sup>268</sup> ‘Countering Communism’, memorandum by the Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>269</sup> ‘Communist Penetration of Trades Unions’, Foreign Office paper as circulated to the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> September 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

<sup>270</sup> ‘The Communists and the Trade Unions’, memorandum by the Ministry of Labour and National Service, as circulated to the AC (H), 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1952, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

notably the construction of Britain's nuclear infrastructure - it was still felt that it would be morally dubious and legally difficult for the State to implement positive vetting procedures. Although negative vetting had been extended to industry since 1949,<sup>272</sup> the government was so acutely sensitive to union pride that this was only announced, reluctantly, in late 1951 following the adoption of further safeguards to Atomic security post-Fuchs.<sup>273</sup> In any event, though eventually adopted, the introduction of positive vetting would most likely have proven ineffectual – due to the volume of work it was already burdened with, MI5 was unable to provide accurate lists even of trade union executives, particularly at the local level.<sup>274</sup> All of which meant that to large extent the countering of communism and indeed militancy more generally was ultimately reliant upon the continued co-operation of union leadership. It should be stressed however that this was not an equal partnership – the passing of classified information to union executives was particularly frowned upon by the Security Service and had been for some time. Even during negotiations regarding industrial vetting procedure MI5 had attempted to argue that all cases should be dealt with by a committee of 'retired and serving Public Servants' with no information regarding procedures to be shared with representatives from private industry.<sup>275</sup> There existed here a considerable split in official opinion however – where MI5 deeply opposed the idea of sharing information outside of government, the idea became increasingly attractive at a Ministerial level. Encouraged in large part by the Foreign Office, from 1951 Cabinet-level efforts to co-opt trade union leadership into acting as surrogates for counter-subversion policy became steadily more common.<sup>276</sup> As put within the AC (H)'s initial assessment of communist penetration of the unions:

'The question was raised how far trade union leaders were aware of the power of the Communists in the shop-steward movement, and how far they knew which of their officials Communists or crypto-Communists. It was believed that the knowledge of trade union leaders on this point was often very

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<sup>272</sup> 'Placing in Employment of Communists', Memorandum by the Minister of Labour and National Service to GEN 183, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1949, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>273</sup> 'Atomic Energy Personnel Security – The new procedure inconsistent with previous Ministerial Decisions', Report by the Committee on Positive Vetting to GEN 183, 15<sup>th</sup> August 1951, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>274</sup> Comments by Dick White to meeting of the AC (H), 4<sup>th</sup> May 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

<sup>275</sup> MI5 comments on 'An Advisory Board for Industry', as circulated to GEN 183, 26<sup>th</sup> March 1949, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>276</sup> Richard Stevens, 'Cold War Politics: Communism and Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, Vol I*, ed. Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman and John McIlroy, (Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999), p. 171

incomplete, and it was agreed that it would be desirable that they should be enlightened wherever possible.<sup>277</sup>

Indeed the importance of doing this was such that the occasional dissemination of classified materials to union leaders was openly countenanced, in direct contrast to MI5's position.<sup>278</sup> Whilst the Security Service was reluctant to formally incorporate non-official channels as a means of countering domestic communism – due mainly to concerns over security – the AC (H) saw an opportunity to sidestep official limitations. With government machinery unable to act directly against communism in industry - owing to the risk of severe political and legal repercussion were it to be caught interfering in trade union politics – Whitehall began to explore the use of 'state-private' networks in an attempt to circumvent the perceived limitations of official action, a trend which would continue into the early 1960s as shall be discussed.

### **Counter-Subversion in Academia**

Industry was not the only area in which communist influence aroused official concern. Academia also was singled out for special consideration and the deliberation of communist academics was the subject of many early AC (H) discussions. The first mention of communist influence in academia arose at the second meeting of the AC (H), held in July 1951. The recorded minutes for that meeting made note that 'It was generally agreed that the question of Communism among the student classes and the scientists was of special importance and that the method of dealing with it would require very careful consideration.'<sup>279</sup> In response, the AC (H) advocated for the creation of networks of informants within the academic community who could be relied upon to relate information about suspect colleagues to the government as well as work within their respective universities to marginalise the views of communist academics. As put by John Winnifrith (later Sir) – then under-secretary at the Treasury – the basic idea was to decide:

'The names of a number of gentlemen in the different Universities who... might be approached on this subject. It was agreed that no attempt should be made in the first place to make contact with all Universities... The object should be to find out whether a substantial Communist problem existed in the

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<sup>277</sup> AC (H) discussion regarding FO memorandum entitled 'Countering Communism', 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 17<sup>th</sup> July 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737



University and, if so, how serious it was, with a special reference to the prevalence of Communism amongst scientists and economists.’<sup>280</sup>

Unsurprisingly Oxford and Cambridge were both selected amongst the initial institutions to be targeted, as were Manchester, Glasgow, the London School of Economics and University College London.<sup>281</sup> Reflecting perhaps the individual biases of the members of the Committee, Oxford and Cambridge received far greater scrutiny than any of the other institutions – despite the fact that the government believed the Birmingham, Manchester, Nottingham, Hull and Glasgow all to be harbouring ‘Communist cells’ within their various departments (mainly Russian, also History in the case of Manchester, and Education in the case of Hull).<sup>282</sup> Of the universities selected Oxford presented the least worry, with the feedback of FW Deakin (Warden of St Anthony’s College, formerly literary agent to Churchill and member of SOE during the war) recorded as:

‘Deakin’s view was that Communism was not a serious problem at that University, nor that it was particularly prevalent among scientists and economists; rather it was to be found in certain maladjusted types who could easily be recognised.’<sup>283</sup>

Cambridge meanwhile received far greater attention – predominantly due to worries that the economics faculty had become irreparably tainted through the influence of a number of Marxist economists.<sup>284</sup> Again, an informal approach was adopted as spring 1952 saw Norman Brook contact Professor Stanley Dennison over the matter of Communism in Cambridge. Dennison, a Fellow of Gonville and Caius College passed on that although:

‘Known communists in the faculty had little or no influence on the political views of undergraduates... The most immediate danger was that the Governing Board or Executive of the Faculty might be captured by persons of communist views or sympathies, in accordance with characteristic communist tactics, in which event there was every likelihood that more University teaching appointments would go to communist fellow-travellers. The University and college authorities in Cambridge, however were now fully alive to the dangers.’<sup>285</sup>

It seems likely Dennison used the AC (H)’s enquiries as a pretext for his own professional gain and exaggerated the influence of communists in the faculty in order to advance his own position. Certainly Dennison had been involved in a long running

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<sup>280</sup> John Winniffrith to the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 17<sup>th</sup> July 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>281</sup> Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 17<sup>th</sup> July 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>282</sup> ‘Communism in the Schools and Universities – Annex B: Communist Infiltration in the field of Education’, report circulated to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>283</sup> Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>284</sup> Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 24<sup>th</sup> March 1952, CAB 134/737

<sup>285</sup> Minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> July 1952, TNA, CAB 134/737

dispute within the Economics Faculty for several years, as he favoured a more liberal economic model as opposed to that of Dobb's Marxist interpretation.<sup>286</sup> Equally it is notable, though perhaps coincidental, that Dobb did not achieve a University readership at Cambridge until 1959 (he had first taken up a lecturing post in the late '20s, before gaining a full Fellowship at Trinity in 1948) – a year after Dennison had left to accept a post at Queens' College Belfast.<sup>287</sup> It is also telling that in his reply to Brook, Dennison had stated that 'he would think it quite appropriate to be influenced in making an appointment to a teaching post by a consideration that the applicant was known or believed to be a communist'.<sup>288</sup> Certainly MI5's assessment of the situation was not nearly so dire and advocated that the matter was dropped entirely:

'A good deal of special attention has been paid to the problem of Communism in Cambridge, past and present, and the results of these researches do not so far indicate that DOBB and SRAFFA [Piero Sraffa – Italian economist, also employed at Cambridge] have played a particularly sinister role such as would qualify them for priority investigation in a current context. It is true that these two Communist lecturers in economics have both been at Cambridge continuously since about 1926, (most of the time, significantly enough at Trinity, the key college), and that throughout the thirties DOBB's influence was a powerful factor in stimulating communism at the University; however, DOBB's Communist interests have generally been public in character and have extended far beyond the confines of Cambridge, and neither DOBB nor SRAFFA appears to have dabbled in under-cover practices... In the circumstances, we can probably afford to let these two cases rest where they are.'<sup>289</sup>

In this instance the Security Service acted as something of a brake on Whitehall's more reactionary tendencies with regards to communism within academia. MI5, though quite capable of questionable judgement in their own right as will be discussed shortly, did still continue to act as the voice of restraint within government. Indeed it is telling that communism in the universities seems only to have been a real point of concern for the AC (H) in the earliest portion of the 1950s. By 1953, the topic appeared far less frequently within the Committee's minutes and by 1954 had been dropped almost entirely.<sup>290</sup> The episode is indicative of a continued ministerial failing to fully understand domestic communism, despite the great strides made since 1945. By 1951 ministers still had a

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<sup>286</sup> 'Maurice Dobb', *ODNB*, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/50967?docPos=3>

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> Prof. Stanley Dennison to Sir Norman Brook, as reported to the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> July 1952, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>289</sup> Security Service assessment, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1952, TNA, KV 2/1759

<sup>290</sup> There was no discussion of communism in universities at meetings of the AC (H) from 1955 onwards – see TNA, CAB 134/740 to CAB 134/1349

tendency to view the ideology as a single homogenous block, with a successful counter-subversion strategy requiring that all parts be tackled equally.<sup>291</sup> Meanwhile, though initial efforts were well intentioned there was also a considerable degree of unhelpful amateurism still present. The wisdom of delegating what was essentially professional intelligence work to friends and associates within academia was, regardless of prior wartime experience, dubious at best and there seems to have been little gained as a result of the exercise other than a realisation that prior concerns had been misplaced. There are perhaps uncomfortable parallels with McCarthyism here, as officialdom acted to limit individuals' influence based more on ideological grounds than strict assessment of their danger to national security. Whilst the Committee's actions are understandable when the extent of Whitehall's institutional knowledge about communism is taken into account, they still act as proof that Ministers were fully capable of foolhardy decision-making in the pursuit of a more aggressive strategy.

The Security Service misjudged their surveillance targeting, as they themselves embarked upon a campaign of anti-communist surveillance concurrent with the AC (H)'s separate efforts. From MI5's perspective, increased oversight of private individuals employed by the universities was warranted as a necessary measure in the fight to curtail communism's appeal. It was felt that such an approach would tackle two issues concurrently, granting insight into the ideological appeal of communists by solving the long-standing problem of why intelligent, successful British citizens would feel an affinity to communism whilst meanwhile hopefully mitigating future security risks by providing the Security Service with a more detailed picture of domestic communism beyond the confines of CPGB's hierarchy. To take the introductory remarks of the file regarding Christopher Hill – the pre-eminent historian of early-modern England – as an example, the aim was to first increase official understanding of the problem, so that effective policy could later be implemented to guard against it. The B division officer assigned to his case made his initial application to begin pervasive monitoring of Hill's activities as follows:

'HILL is one of the leading Communists at Oxford University and plays a prominent part in all the Party's cultural work. He is one of the persons whom I have selected (in consultation with Thistlethwaite)<sup>292</sup> as

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<sup>291</sup> 'Countering Communism', Memorandum by the FO, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>292</sup> Presumably Richard Thistlethwaite, who would go on to head F Division during the later 1960s. Aldrich & Cormac, *The Black Door*, p. 277

deserving further investigation, in order to increase our knowledge of Communism at the Universities. An application for a Home Office Warrant is submitted herewith for signature is approved.’<sup>293</sup>

Although Hill had been a member of the Communist Party since 1935 and thus had already cropped up occasionally on the periphery of Security Service investigations, it was the combination of his political views with his profession that singled him out for significant individual attention from 1951.<sup>294</sup> This distinguished him from fellow member of the Communist Party Historians Group and subject of Security Service attention Eric Hobsbawm. Unlike Hill, Hobsbawm had come to the attention of MI5 as early as 1942, when whilst a sergeant in the Army Education Corps, he had attempted to arrange for a German communist to present a lecture for the benefit of enlisted personnel.<sup>295</sup> At the outset, Hill himself was of little interest individually to the government – the eventual aim was to monitor him in the hope of building a more complete understanding of potential communist networks within the academic profession. The briefing for B divisions ‘watchers’ (officers within MI5 immediately responsible for conducting surveillance) informed personnel assigned to the case that:

‘This investigation is being carried out with a view to establishing the identity of his [Hill’s] contacts at the University and in the cultural field generally, and to obtain the names of intellectuals sympathetic to the Party who may not already be known to us. We are therefore interested in all persons who telephone to HILL or to his wife.’<sup>296</sup>

From the Security Service’s perspective, it seemed as if the best way to address the ‘Achilles heel’ identified by Brook - namely lack of detailed information about communist intellectuals outside the CPGB - was to attempt to use established knowledge regarding CPGB membership to map professional and social connections outside of it. Sadly, in the case of Christopher Hill, such high-minded intentions soon devolved into little more than the reporting of gossip and spurious rumour. An excellent example of this being the initial report on his personal life and relationship with his then wife Inez Hill:<sup>297</sup>

‘Inez HILL is described as a somewhat neurotic, rather emotional and unstable person... She has announced recently that she is sick to death of the Party and of Communism and no longer wishes to belong. It is difficult to say whether this resolution represents her fixed political determination, boredom with her husband’s political activities or may merely be the result of a gush of emotionalism. Since he is

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<sup>293</sup> J.L. Vernon (B Division officer), request to DDG for approval of Home Office warrant application, 10<sup>th</sup> December 1952, TNA, KV 2/3941

<sup>294</sup> Minute Sheet to Christopher Hill’s Security Service file, entries begin July 1935 – though no substantive analysis occurred until 1950, TNA, KV 2/3941

<sup>295</sup> See opening comments in Hobsbawm’s initial MI5 file, TNA, KV 2/3980

<sup>296</sup> B.4.B (Aids to Investigation) briefing sheet, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1951, TNA, KV 2/3941

<sup>297</sup> Hill’s first wife was not a communist, but rather the daughter of an Army officer. The marriage broke down shortly after this report. See ‘Christopher Hill’, *ODNB*: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/89437>

reputed to give his wife a very small sum as a dress allowance or pin-money Inez HILL may well resent the Communist Party absorbing what would otherwise go towards a new summer dress for herself... Christopher HILL himself, has been described in the past as somewhat mean-minded, pompous and tiresome.<sup>298</sup>

The report would seem to serve little purpose other than as an example of how dated 50's attitudes towards women have now become. Certainly there is nothing contained within of any particular relevance to national security. Meanwhile, attitudes within the wider government were more of slight embarrassment than support for the investigation – Sir Reader Bullard's 1953 'Report on Soviet Studies in the Universities of the UK' included the rather pointed remark that:

'Hill is admittedly a Marxist historian and, according to Deakin, he is a member of the Communist Party. He does not, however, engage in Soviet studies. His period is the seventeenth century. Recently he gave an interesting BBC talk on the Barebones Parliament, representing it as innocent of the opinions attributed to it by the people who destroyed it and as advancing views now accepted as laudable.'<sup>299</sup>

The whole episode was demonstration that the Security Service, despite on the whole being fairly pragmatic in its approach, still possessed the capacity for mistakes. Such errors did impact upon individual reputations and careers in a manner which in hindsight is difficult to justify. Prior to the aforementioned BBC talk for example, MI5 felt compelled to write directly to the Corporation and inform ominously that they 'may care to know that this man has a Communist history in this office dating from 1935, and is known to us as a current member.'<sup>300</sup> What precise relevance this information may have had to the broadcasting of a documentary about a short-lived mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century parliament is unclear. Though the Security Service's aims were arguably well-intentioned, and the process by which they reached the decision to investigate Hill plausibly justifiable, it nevertheless struggled at times to accurately identify genuine subversive threats. Every communist was not a security risk, despite the closeness of their links to the CPGB. That Hill's file, complete with warrants permitting wire taps and postal checks, continued to be regularly updated until at least the early 1960s is testament to this much at least.<sup>301</sup>

### **Co-operation between the US and UK**

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<sup>298</sup> B Division assessment of Christopher and Inez Hill, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1950, TNA, KV 2/3941

<sup>299</sup> 'Extract from Secret Supplement to the Report by Sir Reader Bullard on Soviet Studies in the Universities of the UK', 26<sup>th</sup> August 1953, TNA, KV 2/3943

<sup>300</sup> N. Dabell (B Division officer) to N.E. Wadsley (BBC Secretary), 19<sup>th</sup> May 1953, TNA, KV 2/3943

<sup>301</sup> File TNA, KV 2/3946 covers Hill until 1962. Due to the informal 50 year declassification rule however, there is potential that Security Service monitoring of Hill's activities continued past this point.

In spite of missteps such as Hill and the wider investigation into communist academics, anti-communist measures were still slight by international standards. It is important to stress that although the early 1950s saw Britain strengthen anti-communist legislation and enact a considerably more aggressive policy than previously, British actions were consistently milder than those undertaken in the United States over the same period. There were no political figures who sought to capture the same sort of populist demagoguery as typified by Senator Joseph McCarthy – who delivered his infamous Lincoln Day speech in February 1950 claiming to possess ‘A list of 205 – a list of names that were made known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.’<sup>302</sup> It would equally have been unthinkable for a Director General of MI5 to appear on public radio (or indeed to make public announcements at all for that matter)<sup>303</sup> and warn that ‘Communists have been and are today at work within the very gates of America. There are few walks in American life which they do not traverse... Wherever they may be, they have in common on diabolic ambition: to weaken and to eventually destroy American democracy by stealth and cunning’<sup>304</sup> as Director of the FBI J. Edgar Hoover did in May 1950. Though the official language of Whitehall could occasionally stray into similar dehumanising terms – communists as an ‘infection’ began to occur as a common trope across government departments from the early ‘50s onwards – the idea of members of Britain’s Secret State issuing public warnings about the communist menace would have been deemed wholly inappropriate. Meanwhile it is telling that both Attlee and Churchill shared the opinion that the American response was both distasteful and wholly disproportionate.<sup>305</sup> The work done for Christopher Andrew’s official history of MI5 was finally able to quantify the differences in approach on publication in 2009. Between 1947 and 1956, US purges of its civil service – beginning under Truman with the ‘Loyalty Program’ – led to the sacking of 2700 federal employees and the resignation of an additional 12000. By contrast, dismissals in the British civil service over the period

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<sup>302</sup> Joseph P. McCarthy to Ohio Country Women’s Republican Club, Wheeling WV, February 9<sup>th</sup> 1950

<sup>303</sup> The Director-General of MI5 would not make such a public appearance until Dame Stella Rimington’s publicity campaign for the Service began in 1993, see ‘1993: Secret Service goes public’, BBC News, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1993, as accessed via:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/16/newsid\\_2504000/2504329.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/july/16/newsid_2504000/2504329.stm)

<sup>304</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, public radio broadcast, May 1950, op cit. M. J. Heale, *American Anti-Communism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, Maryland, 1990), p. 162

<sup>305</sup> Stafford, *Churchill & Secret Service*, p. 384

1948-1954 amounted to a mere 124.<sup>306</sup> Even accounting for the disparity in time-span and size of the United States compared to Britain, the difference is still striking.

Nonetheless, despite official distaste for American anti-communist zealotry and markedly more restrained application of counter-subversion legislation Britain did, grudgingly, find itself a surrogate player to McCarthyite hysteria. As a result of the continued importance of the Special Relationship to British policy – both foreign and domestic – as well as assessment that membership of NATO incurred certain responsibilities to counter communist activities in a robust fashion, considerable co-operation with the United States on anti-communist measures occurred. This is perhaps most in evidence in the direction of MI5's activities over the period, with the Security Service accepting American instruction to investigate certain suspected communists, even if not always accepting the premise behind the investigation. The Service's investigation into Robert Oppenheimer a case in point. Although Oppenheimer had once occupied some of the most sensitive positions in the American defence establishment – heading the wartime nuclear research efforts at Los Alamos and acting as chairman of the General Advisory Committee to the US Atomic Energy Commission in the late 1940s – he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1949 where he admitted association (albeit minor) with the US Communist Party in the 1930s.<sup>307</sup> Matters were compounded in 1953, when Oppenheimer's security clearance was suspended as a result of his past communist associations – leading to the nuclear scientist to insist on a hearing, which was scheduled for spring 1954.<sup>308</sup> In December 1953, Oppenheimer travelled to London on a long planned trip. Initially informed of Oppenheimer's travel plans in the October of that year, the Security Service were formally asked by the FBI to monitor the scientist's movements and report any information which might be deemed of interest.<sup>309</sup> As recorded by the E Division (the division responsible for 'Counter-Subversion: Home & Overseas, as a result of White's reforms earlier in '53) officer in charge of the case:

'On 11.12.53 Mr. O'Brien [FBI legal attaché to the US Embassy in London] came to see me regarding this case. He said he was under pressure from Washington to report on OPPENHEIMER's activities, particularly as Washington had heard that OPPENHEIMER had visited this country and had then gone on to France. O'Brien asked if we had any adverse information regarding OPPENHEIMER's visit here. He

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<sup>306</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 395

<sup>307</sup> Kai Bird & Martin J. Sherwin, *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, (Atlantic Books, London, 2009), pp. 394-396

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 482

<sup>309</sup> J. Philip O'Brien (Deputy Legal Attaché to the US Embassy London), October 7<sup>th</sup> 1953, TNA, KV 2/3875

also asked what degree of coverage we were giving this visit. I told him that action had been taken to alert the security authorities concerned with AERE [the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell] and that we had taken the routine step of asking for a Police report in the event that OPPENHEIMER had come to their adverse notice. Beyond that we had, on present information, no justification for taking any special action. If however he had additional information which would warrant such action I should be glad to have it.... O'Brien said in fact he had no such information.'<sup>310</sup>

The Security Service would monitor individuals on behalf of the American Government, however it was not willing to stray from its constitutional role, or contravene established procedure in order to satisfy the whims of American politics. Such an attitude was typical of Service behaviour over the period. When sent a missive by the FBI warning that Julian Huxley (noted British evolutionary Biologist, director of UNESCO and founding member of the World Wildlife Fund) had been invited to a joint West/East scientific conference to be held in India in late 1952 the Service's response was merely:

'Several of these scientists are known to us, but have nothing adverse recorded against them. The following notes may be passed to the Director of the Bureau... Although politically HUXLEY is believed to be "very left-wing" there seems to be no reason to regard him now as being in sympathy either with the Soviet Union or with Communism.'<sup>311</sup>

It is testament to the strength of the transatlantic alliance that at least spirited disagreement could occur. A similar approach was in evidence during the Service's investigation into Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin had attracted the ire of Hoover's FBI as a result of support for pro Soviet groups during the War, coupled with an affair with the actress Joan Barry – which resulted in public scandal in the United States and Chaplin's popularity plummeting accordingly.<sup>312</sup> After leaving the US for the premiere of his latest film *Limelight* in London in 1951, Chaplin had his re-entry permit revoked on the order of then attorney general James McGranery.<sup>313</sup> Eager to ensure that Chaplin could not re-enter the country should a legal challenge be issued, the FBI contacted MI5 to see whether further proof of communist association could be acquired. Whilst the Security Service co-operated with the investigation, opinion of the case within the Service was withering. Initial instruction from John Marriot regarding how to proceed with the investigation was particularly sharp:

'I think it better not to volunteer the information [requested by the US legal attaché], but to confine ourselves to answering the specific questions put by the FBI. If they really want to whip up a case against CHAPLIN, they can read Pravda for themselves. It is curious that we can find no record of CHAPLIN's

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<sup>310</sup> P.B Ray (E Division officer), Note for File, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1953, TNA, KV 2/3875

<sup>311</sup> C.W.E. Uren (Security Liaison Officer, New Delhi), response to information request by J.A. Cimperman (US Legal Attaché, US Embassy, London), 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1952, TNA, KV 2/3875

<sup>312</sup> John McCabe, *Charlie Chaplin*, (Robson Books, London, 1978), pp.214-215

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, p. 222



birth, but I scarcely think that this is of any security significance.’<sup>314</sup>

Though the file on Chaplin remained open until 1960, it is clear that few Service resources were expended on the investigation. The last report of note in Chaplin’s file summed up the whole affair nicely:

‘CHAPLIN, when resident in America, was the subject of several reports associating him with Communism. These reports, the veracity of which we are unable to check, and which do not impress us by their prima facie quality, induced the American authorities to rule in 1952 and 1953 that he would not be permitted to re-enter the USA... We have no substantial information of our own against CHAPLIN, and we are not satisfied that there are reliable grounds for regarding him as a security risk... It may be that CHAPLIN is a Communist sympathiser but on the information before us he would appear to be no more than a “progressive” or radical.’<sup>315</sup>

British co-operation with the US on investigations related to individuals accused of communism for political rather than security reasons was not necessarily indicative of approval. As the aforementioned MI5 cases show, more often than not co-operation with the FBI was a matter of courtesy rather than belief that an individual constituted a genuine security threat.

As an aside however – US paranoia did occasionally prove useful to British intelligence, such as in the case of Cedric Belfrage. Belfrage, a British journalist resident in the United States since the 1930s, had whilst employed by the British Security Coordination (MI6’s black propaganda outfit, whose purpose was to help sway US opinion towards intervention in Europe prior to December 1941) passed classified material concerning BSC to the Soviet Union over the course of the war.<sup>316</sup> Whilst MI5 initially dismissed American interest in Belfrage ‘These communist connections do not amount to anything beyond a mild interest in left-wing affairs’<sup>317</sup>, the FBI was more tenacious and obtained a confession from Belfrage in 1947.<sup>318</sup> Meanwhile, though MI5 believed by this point that he had been an important Soviet agent during the war, sufficient evidence could not be obtained to ensure a successful prosecution.<sup>319</sup> Though the episode is perhaps of secondary importance in an assessment of British anti-communist policy, it is worth noting that the American approach did on occasion produce greater success than that of

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<sup>314</sup> Instruction from J.H. Marriot to B Division, Minute 18, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1952, TNA, KV 2/3700

<sup>315</sup> Report by H. P. Goodwyn (F Division officer), 24<sup>th</sup> February 1958, TNA, KV 2/3700

<sup>316</sup> See *British Security Coordination: The Secret History of British Intelligence in the Americas, 1940-45*, ed. Nigel West, (St Ermin’s Press, London, 1998), also Jennet Conant, *The Irregulars: Roald Dahl and the British Spy Ring in Wartime Washington*, (Simon & Schuster, London, 2008)

<sup>317</sup> F Division assessment of Cedric Belfrage, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1944, TNA, KV 2/4004

<sup>318</sup> B Division briefing regarding the Belfrage case, serial 70, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1953, TNA, KV 2/4004

<sup>319</sup> Legal analysis of the Belfrage case, minute, serial 71, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1953, KV 2/4004

Whitehall's. On the whole however, whilst the British government could be accused of a degree of hypocrisy – American practices were readily criticised whilst a number of solely UK-based investigations were also predicated on similarly flimsy grounds as discussed – nevertheless it is comforting to note that ideological purges on an American scale were never contemplated in any meaningful sense by Whitehall policy makers and moreover that the prevailing governmental culture was almost entirely hostile to such measures ever being realistically considered.

### **Explaining the Lack of Overt Suppression**

Beyond distaste for the overt suppression of communists as practised by the FBI during the early 1950s, Whitehall increasingly believed that harsher measures – for example proscription of the Communist Party - would ultimately accomplish little by way of management of the communist subversive threat and indeed would most likely prove counter-productive in the long run. Experiences during the early 50s of attempting to manage the communist 'Peace Movement' – that varied network of groups run from 1948 by the Soviet-controlled World Peace Council, which all ostensibly advocated for world peace whilst quietly ignoring Soviet transgression in favour of ever more shrill condemnation of Western actions – taught the British government that a light touch could often produce the best results.<sup>320</sup> The question of freedom of movement was particularly instructive in this regard. The travel of British nationals and UK based organisations to the Soviet Bloc were all too often exploited for the purposes of Soviet propaganda and could be seen to legitimise the communist position.<sup>321</sup> However, attempting to prevent travel, particularly en-masse was equally problematic. The futility of attempting to prevent travel to communist countries and events was proved by a number of ill-fated attempts to restrict movement in the early '50s – most notably during the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Festival of Youth and Students held in East Berlin in August 1951. Though subject to negative reaction in the majority of British press outlets as well as the Labour Party enacting a standing ban on any of its membership travelling to participate – the conference still attracted circa 300 British students.<sup>322</sup> Meanwhile, the United States

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<sup>320</sup> Similarly, see actions taken against the World Federation of Scientific Workers over the same period, Styles, *World Federation of Scientific Workers*, pp. 42-44

<sup>321</sup> The *Daily Worker* in particular, unsurprisingly, delighted in reporting such events – along with details of the socialist utopias British delegations behind the Iron Curtain inevitably encountered.

<sup>322</sup> 'Extracts from Despatches from His Majesty's Consul, Innsbruck, about Youth Parties proceeding to Berlin via Austria, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1951, as cited in report entitled 'British Reaction to the Detention of British

government had reached the decision to prohibit all travel to the Festival – a salient point, given that the majority of British students planned on reaching East Berlin via travel through Austria, then still under occupation by US forces. Trains carrying large quantities of British and French nationals were stopped by American military personnel at the Austrian border town of Saalfelden, whereupon the students were told to turn back and prevented from further travel – in some cases physically as groups attempted to push through American troops.<sup>323</sup> The incident proved a godsend for communist propagandists as condemnatory articles appeared throughout the British press:

‘A Durham University student who has arrived back in London after attempting to reach East Berlin for the Festival last night described his reaction to what he had seen in the Occupied Zone of Austria as “one of shock of the American treatment of British citizens and the contempt for the British passport”... Some of the things he did see, he alleged, were: armed guards of American occupation troops with fixed bayonets lining his party of 300 against a wall and telling them they would be shot if they moved; a British girl who had been “punched and kicked” by American troops; and two youths who had been bayoneted by them. He alleged, too, that the party he was in had been kept in barbed wire compounds covered by machine guns and mortars without food, water, or sanitation for 24 hours.’<sup>324</sup>

The furore did not harm official US/UK relations overly much. Herbert Morrison’s letter to the US embassy (though slightly obsequious in tone) expressed regret over the incident, yet concluded that reports of inhumane treatment had been much exaggerated whilst any ‘unpleasant experience’ experienced by the students was a ‘natural consequence of the line of conduct which they themselves chose to follow’<sup>325</sup>. However, a salutary lesson to both governments was identified in that the political cost of restricting travel on ideological grounds was usually not worth the reward. The US State Department report on the incident commented in the aftermath that:

‘It is obvious... that the policy of restricting and hindering travel to the Youth Festival has caused a substantial amount of adverse reaction in Britain. In the light of this, we question whether the decision was a wise one, and seriously doubt that the possible advantages of restricting travel outweigh the obvious disadvantages... It is possible to attribute a certain amount of British “touchiness” to the general feeling... Nevertheless, it should not be minimised that there is a deep-rooted attachment to liberal ideas in Britain, freedoms of speech, travel, and opinion which the average Briton believes are the inalienable rights of

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Delegates to the Communist World Youth Festival (No. II)’, 29<sup>th</sup> August 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

<sup>323</sup> Telegram from US Embassy London to Secretary of State, 20<sup>th</sup> August 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

<sup>324</sup> ‘Students Protest Experiences in Trying to Reach Berlin’, *Manchester Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1951, as cited by US Embassy London in report entitled ‘British Reaction to the Detention of British Delegates to the Communist World Youth Festival’, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

<sup>325</sup> Herbert Morrison to the US Embassy London, October 8<sup>th</sup> 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

British subjects... It may be presumed that the present furore will die down, but not without having provided propaganda to our enemies and embarrassment to our friends.<sup>326</sup>

The incident was taken as proof by the Foreign Office that outright repression tended only to fuel communist propaganda rather than providing any tangible benefit to British interests. By the time of the next major communist rally – the World Peace Council's 1952 Vienna Congress – the FO had reached the decision to not refuse passports to those wishing to travel, not only to avoid further embarrassment as had been suffered over the Youth Festival incident, but also due to reasoning that those travelling to attend were most likely 'converted' communists anyway.<sup>327</sup> Where official attitudes to communist activity had hardened – there was a recognition that the appeal of domestic communism could often be mitigated more effectively through nuance than repression. By 1955, the government had begun to exhibit considerably more pragmatism in its approach to domestic communism as it learned to turn undesirable situations to British advantage without playing into the hands of the communist narrative. As was realised, the travel of British nationals and delegations provided opportunities for the acquisition of information about countries behind the Iron Curtain which otherwise may have been unattainable. Certainly this was the prevailing Foreign Office theory – policy guidelines provided by the FO in 1953 stated:

'In principle, our policy at present is as follows: (a) to secure the earliest possible information of a delegation's departure and then to arrange for suitable representatives (if any) to be interviewed and if possible briefed. (b) To suggest to these delegates that they might visit H.M. Mission, pointing out that our staff at these posts are always glad to speak to people with the latest news of home. (c) To arrange for reliable newspaper correspondents to put a few carefully chosen questions to friendly delegates on their return to this country, and to encourage suitable individuals to publicise their views – by means of newspaper articles or BBC talks.'<sup>328</sup>

Rather than attempts at outright suppression, such as the Treachery Act considered by the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities in the late 1940s, government policy was progressively more defined by attempts to work around, increasingly covertly, the problem of communism rather than overtly repress it.

## **Summary**

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<sup>326</sup> Comments of Margaret Woon (State Department Research Analyst) to US Embassy London, August 16<sup>th</sup> 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

<sup>327</sup> Telegram from US Embassy London to Secretary of State, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1951, NARA, RG 84, Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Great Britain, London Embassy, NND 852401

<sup>328</sup> 'Visits of United Kingdom Delegations to Iron Curtain Countries', Memorandum by the Foreign Office, as circulated to the AC (H), 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

The early 1950s were a period of major change and consolidation for British counter-subversion policy. Where the majority of the Attlee government had been spent attempting to understand communism as fundamentally a problem of security, the final months of Attlee's premiership saw a move towards approaching communism as an ideological threat to British stability as much as a direct security problem. It was this conceptualisation of the matter which would also serve to inform the Churchill and later governments' attempts to manage the problem. Though the security element remained and was indeed strengthened – the move from a relatively limited program of negative vetting to a steadily more comprehensively applied positive vetting system a logical progression of the model currently practised – British domestic anti-communism efforts increasingly attempted to discredit the idea's wider ideological appeal and reduce the ability of communists to influence individuals in wider civil society. Again, it was Soviet espionage which provided the final catalyst for change. The discovery of Klaus Fuch's passing of atomic data convinced the government that greater effort needed to be made to understand the ideological draw of communism, a question which still puzzled ministers and civil servants alike. Meanwhile, the defections of Burgess and Maclean hammered home in the most dramatic way possible the fact that communism had the ability to penetrate the very heart of government. The modest defensive measures which had been agonised over by the Attlee government were proven in a single incident to still be ultimately inadequate for their intended purpose. Such events forced the government to accept that still stricter, more pervasive and more universal vetting legislation was required. Where negative vetting had been introduced only reluctantly and in limited fashion, evidence of Soviet espionage by those who had been trusted servants of the British State finally bolstered resolve sufficiently to generate the political will necessary to introduce pervasive and steadily comprehensively applied vetting procedure, even despite the significant additional financial burden this entailed.

Meanwhile, it was realised that officialdom possessed little substantive understanding of the underlying attraction of communism as an ideology. That communism inspired security breaches continued to occur despite the decline of the CPGB as a political force (such as it ever was) demonstrated that the defensively orientated model for preventing communist subversion was predicated on a false set of assumptions. British counter-subversion policy from the early '50s onwards attempted to tackle communism as fundamentally an ideological problem and not merely security based. Such a change in

understanding was, naturally, accompanied by a change in approach defined by far greater focus on the role of communism in civil society. The aim now was to undermine the communist political narrative and so prevent the further spread of communism as a political philosophy, particularly in those groups deemed to be both influential and particularly 'at-risk' to communist sympathies, notably academia and the trade unions. As such, the '50s witnessed the growth of counter-propaganda as an integral part of Britain's anti-communism tactics on the home front, a role spearheaded by the Information Research Department and thus bringing the Foreign Office into the historically novel position as having a significant domestic remit along with its historical overseas role. The focus on ideology was not without risks however as demonstrated by the government's activities within academia. The more nebulous nature of the ideological problem lead the government to engage in investigations and actions which in hindsight are difficult to justify, as resources were wasted on investigating those who realistically did little to further the cause of communism in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, it is clear that Britain never fell prey to the same paranoia which defined the US response over the same period – moreover it is evident that at most levels of government there was little appetite for anti-communist reprisal of the sort typified by Joseph McCarthy. At the very least, the period from July 1950 to April 1955 provided a series of valuable lessons for the British government as it attempted to fumble its way towards a cohesive and increasingly complex domestic anti-communism strategy which sought to protect the State via more pervasive positive vetting methods, whilst undermining the ideological appeal and influence of communism via an aggressively targeted counter-propaganda campaign. 1950-1955 was therefore characterised by a more confident and proactive, if inexpertly applied strategy. By the time Churchill left office in early April 1955 to be succeeded by his Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, a great deal of experience had been gained, yet counter-subversion policy remained at a deadlock.

### **Breakthrough: May 1955- October 1959**

British domestic counter-subversion efforts stood at something of a stalemate as of May 1955. Whilst vetting reforms and MI5 surveillance had been effective in guarding the state against domestic communist predation, the considerable efforts made during the Churchill government to undermine communism's influence and appeal within academia and industry had experienced only limited success. Members of the Communist Party remained entrenched in certain key unions (particularly those related to engineering, shipbuilding and mining) and government propaganda showed little sign of undermining the Marxist intelligentsia's faith in pro-Soviet communism. Breakthrough was provided however, as the periods of the Eden government and early years of the Macmillan administration brought unexpected change and upheaval to the foundations of Britain's radical left. The events of the period dealt what would prove to be irreparable damage to the credibility of the domestic communist movement, as developments behind the Iron Curtain demonstrated in the starkest terms the extent of the hypocrisy at the very heart of the Soviet system. The collapse of Soviet communism's intellectual appeal within Britain following Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in early 1956 and the heavy-handed Soviet subjugation of the Hungarian revolution in the late October/early November of that same year proved to be a crisis from which the CPGB would be unable to recover. The late '50s saw an exodus from the British Communist Party as almost a third of party membership left within a year of 1956.<sup>329</sup> This mass-desertion made all the more damaging due to the fact that a substantial proportion of those who abandoned the Party post-'56 belonged to the influential intellectual core of the Party – individuals such as Christopher Hill, E.P Thomson and John Saville – who had provided a degree of credibility through their membership and by leaving rendered the Party bereft of both intellectual authority and political imagination.

With the collapse of communist appeal within the more high-brow elements of the radical left, official attention became focused almost overwhelmingly on the question of communist activity within the trade unions. Specifically, the issue of communist influence over trade union leadership increasingly produced the greatest official concern. Spurred on by a series of historical reports which traced union unrest in the early '50s

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<sup>329</sup> Francis Beckett, *Enemy Within*, (John Murray, London, 1995), p. 138

back to communist interference, as well as concerns that communist-controlled union leadership could forcibly drag the Labour Party to the radical left, anti-communist efforts directed at industry increased exponentially during the late 1950s. Again, 1956 brought what in hindsight would prove to be a major breakthrough in industrially focused anti-communist efforts, as MI5 monitoring learned of communist cheating in the elections of the Electrical Trades Union – a revelation which in time would prove key to the demise of communism’s industrial credibility. However, although the tumult caused by 1956 also proved to be problematic for the British government. With the gradual rise of the ‘New Left’, Whitehall found itself confounded by a new sort of political movement. Though undeniably viewed as more benign than pro-Soviet communism,<sup>330</sup> in many ways certain aspects of the New Left movement proved just as troubling for British officialdom as communism had been. The rise of anti-nuclear sentiment in particular – formalised by the founding of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1957 – worried Whitehall considerably, as the goal of maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent continued to remain central to British defence policy.<sup>331</sup> However, the security threat posed by the New Left as a whole was not as clear cut as communism had been – the Macmillan government struggled throughout the late ‘50s to accurately identify and counter the threat posed by the New Left without straying into the realms of disproportionate response. Meanwhile, beyond the changing priorities brought on by shifting political circumstance, the period also witnessed a marked increase in cultural counter-subversion efforts, directed principally at the burgeoning visual media sectors of film and television. As the cost of television ownership gradually became more affordable for the general population, the government showed a steady interest in monitoring the output of the BBC and private film-makers, in an attempt to mitigate the risk of communist propaganda reaching wide swathes of the British public. As such, British counter-subversion policy over the course of the late 1950s was characterised by four key themes: a diminishment of concern regarding communism within the intellectual and professional classes, steadily increasing anti-communist successes within the unions, the beginnings of the diversification of counter-subversion efforts as a result of changing circumstances and affiliations within the British left and finally greater worry over the potential cultural

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<sup>330</sup> ‘Dissident Communism in Britain’, Supplement to IRD briefing packet for August 1958, 11th September 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>331</sup> As made clear by the Sandys Defence White Paper 1957; ‘Defence: Outline of Future Policy’, Cmd. 124, (HMSO, London, 1957)



impact of more widely diffused Soviet propaganda brought on by wider public access to visual media.

### **Dissent within the CPGB**

Over the course of the late 1950s, Whitehall received a welcome, though wholly unexpected, boost to its counter-subversion efforts thanks to the development of a significant crisis of leadership and credibility suffered by the CPGB as a result of events behind the Iron Curtain during the same period. Namely, from early 1956 onwards the Communist Party of Great Britain experienced major internal dissent – particularly amongst its academic membership – which ultimately culminated in a collapse in membership by 1958. Such a crisis, in hindsight, was perhaps inevitable – though the scale still surprising. Certainly by 1955 there is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of the CPGB’s intellectual membership found the Executive Committee’s (EC) insistence on ideological purity – as defined by the EC - and unilateral decision-making increasingly frustrating, particularly in light of the Party’s failure to recover from its electoral collapse in 1950 over successive General Elections.<sup>332</sup> As news of Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalin at the 20<sup>th</sup> Soviet Party Congress in February 1956 reached Britain – tellingly via a full report of the speech published in the *Observer* in June 1956,<sup>333</sup> rather than through official Communist channels – the level of hypocrisy inherent in the Executive Committee’s slavish adherence to Stalinist policy over the previous thirty years became wholly apparent.<sup>334</sup> Already frustrated by the total lack of political advancement since the Party’s electoral catastrophe in 1950,<sup>335</sup> news of Khrushchev’s denouncement served only to fuel the slow-brewing discontent growing within the CPGB.

Within Britain, the first signs of serious dissent emerged in July 1956, with the publication of *The Reasoner* by John Saville and E.P. Thompson, both members of the

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<sup>332</sup> James Eaden & David Renton, *The Communist Party of Great Britain since 1920*, (Palgrave, New York, 2002), p.109

<sup>333</sup> ‘Russia’s 20 Years of Terror’, *Observer*, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1956, pp. 1-5, 7-9

<sup>334</sup> The dissemination of Khrushchev’s speech in the West was itself a CIA counter-propaganda operation. The Agency had received a full transcript from a Jewish journalist in Poland via the Israeli Mossad, see Matitiah Mayzel, ‘Israeli Intelligence and the leakage of Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech”’, *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, 2013, pp. 257-283

<sup>335</sup> Eaden & Renton, *CPGB since 1920*, pp. 109-111

influential Communist Party Historians Group.<sup>336</sup> The journal's publication provoked outrage amongst the CPGB's Executive Committee, given its openly avowed purpose as a vehicle for examining and questioning the principles and strategy of the Communist Party leadership. Thompson's views on Party leadership were encapsulated via an open letter to George Matthews (then Deputy General Secretary, later editor of the *Daily Worker* from 1958): 'I am not proud of our confusion of the true principles of internationalism with a servile attitude to the leadership of the Soviet Union... I am not proud of the vacillation which our present leadership has shown over the last three months'.<sup>337</sup> A resolution by the Yorkshire district committee of the Communist Party (due to Saville's residence and employment in Hull) calling on the pair to immediately cease publication of *The Reasoner* swiftly followed. When this was ignored, both were then summoned to appear before the CPGB's central Political Committee based in London where they were informed that:

'If they claimed the right to publish their own political journal, they could not deny that right to others. Any individuals or group of individuals disagreeing with any aspect of the democratically decided policy of the Party at any time, would be entitled to produce their own political journals and circulate them. Far from being democratic, this situation would be the negation of democracy. For such journals would be completely beyond the control of the Party membership, and would be produced by individuals not elected by or responsible to the membership.'<sup>338</sup>

Beyond the dubious logic and somewhat creative interpretation of 'democracy' the Political Committee's point was clear – the Party would tolerate no internal dissent. Saville and Thompson were once again ordered to cease publication of the *Reasoner*, a request which was duly ignored as a second issue was brought to print in September. Whilst the episode highlighted the highly centralised and authoritarian character of CPGB leadership, and attracted reasonable support for Saville and Thompson's position (the first issue attracted around 300 letters of support)<sup>339</sup>, it seems plausible that the dispute would have remained controllable for Party higher-ups (the period from July to October 1956 saw only 12 resignations from the Party – all of whom were relatively minor figures)<sup>340</sup> were it not for the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution in late October 1956. The

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<sup>336</sup> Influential study group formed in 1946 to attempt to apply Marxist dialectic to historical enquiry, Willie Thompson, *Setting an Agenda: Thomson, Dobb, Hill and the Communist Party Historians*, (Socialist History Society, London, 2012), p. 3

<sup>337</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Reply to George Matthews', *The Reasoner*, Issue 1, July 1956, p. 15

<sup>338</sup> Report on Savile & Thompson's disciplinary hearing, *World News* (weekly newspaper of the CPGB), 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1956, as included in IRD's September briefing packet, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>339</sup> E. P. Thompson & John Saville, 'The Case for Socialism', *The Reasoner*, Issue 2, September 1956, p. 1

<sup>340</sup> Typically local-level figures uninvolved in central party politics, such as Lawrence Daly, who served on the Scottish district committee, IRD briefing for June 1956, 16<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

timeline of events is worth explaining in detail, for it was the somewhat chaotic manner in which the events of the uprising occurred which ultimately explains why confidence in the CPGB collapsed rather than the occurrence of a revolution in of itself.

The 23<sup>rd</sup> October saw some 20,000 protestors gathered beneath a statue of Józef Bem – hero of the Hungarian revolution of 1848 – in central Budapest to demonstrate against the Soviet Union’s subjugation of Hungarian national sovereignty.<sup>341</sup> By that evening, the crowd had swelled to 200,000, moving across the Danube to outside the Hungarian Parliament building whereupon a list of demands was presented to the government of Ernő Gerő – which included but were not limited to, an affirmation of Hungarian neutrality & removal of Soviet troops still stationed in the country, the implementation of an economic system based upon the principles of democratic socialism, that Hungary should apply for membership of the United Nations, all citizens should be granted the rights of free men and that criminal trials should be brought before open courts.<sup>342</sup> Gerő responded with a speech condemning the demands and rejecting the protestors’ grievances. Tension grew as protestors tore down a 30ft high statue of Stalin on the edge of Budapest’s central park and a group gathered outside the Radio Budapest building – an installation heavily guarded by the Hungarian secret police (*Államvédelmi Hatóság*, henceforth AVH).<sup>343</sup> As protestors attempted to enter the radio station, AVH men opened fire – sparking revolution in Budapest as civil disobedience escalated into open revolt and spread throughout the city.<sup>344</sup> Meanwhile, members of the military sent to relieve the AVH chose instead to side with the protestors – a clear sign that Gerő’s government was now bereft of any real authority. By midnight the Hungarian government had lost any semblance of control – leading Gerő to formally request Soviet military intervention. By 2am, Soviet tanks had entered Budapest. A series of piecemeal skirmishes between Soviet forces and Hungarian revolutionaries ensued – leading to a ceasefire on the 28th October and withdrawal of Soviet troops from Budapest by the 30th. On the 1st November the Hungarian government – now under the leadership of the reform-minded Imre Nagy

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<sup>341</sup> Predominantly students and intellectuals, who had been emboldened by the election of reformer Władysław Gomułka in Poland two days prior. Janos M. Rainer, ‘The Sixteen Point Program’, 1956: *The Hungarian Revolution and War for Independence*, ed. Lee Congdon, Bela K. Kiraly & Karoly Nagy, trans. Paul Body, Andrew Gane & Brian Mclean, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2006), pp. 243-245

<sup>342</sup> Laszlo Eorsi, *The Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Myths & Realities*, trans Mario D. Fenyo, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2006) p. 7

<sup>343</sup> The AVH had technically already been formally dissolved earlier that month, however its former personnel were still closely aligned with the pre-revolutionary government, Eorsi, *Hungarian Revolution of 1956: Myths and Realities*, pp. 12-13

<sup>344</sup> Norman Stone, *The Atlantic and Its Enemies*, (Allen Lane, London, 2010) p. 132

formally announced that the uprising was now officially viewed as a legitimate expression of political will and that Hungary would withdraw from the Warsaw Pact with immediate effect – implementing instead a position of neutrality in all international affairs.<sup>345</sup>

The revolution's success would prove short lived. In the early hours of the 4th November Soviet tanks once again entered Budapest, supported by infantry, air strikes and artillery fire.<sup>346</sup> Meanwhile, a substantial proportion of the new Hungarian government – led by new Defence Secretary Pál Maléter, the Hungarian Army officer who had proved instrumental in securing and coordinating military support for the initial uprising,<sup>347</sup> were invited to Soviet Military command at the town of Tököl (just outside Budapest) under the pretence of peace negotiations - only to be arrested by the KGB.<sup>348</sup> With Soviet forces bolstered to 17 full divisions, compared to the five stationed in Hungary pre-23rd October,<sup>349</sup> and Hungarian leadership in disarray, only token resistance was possible. By 8am any attempt at organised defence in Budapest had collapsed, by the 11th November all resistance across the country had been wholly repressed.<sup>350</sup> In the immediate aftermath, 22'000 Hungarians were sentenced with crimes against the State, whilst an additional 200'000 fled as refugees.<sup>351</sup> The implications of the conflict are perhaps best summated by Allen Dulles' remarks to the US National Security Council in the days following the second Soviet invasion:

'The Hungarian revolt may demonstrate the inability of a moderate national Communist regime to survive in any of the satellites... The revolt confronts Moscow with a very harsh dilemma: either to revert to a harsh

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<sup>345</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Small Wars, Faraway Places: The Genesis of the Modern World: 1945-65*, (Macmillan, London, 2013), p. 290

<sup>346</sup> Jenő Györkei & Miklós Horváth, *Soviet Military Intervention in Hungary, 1956*, (Central European University Press, New York, 1999), p. 350

<sup>347</sup> Maléter has since been revered as a hero of the revolution, however his initial siding with the revolutionary forces seems to have been an accident rather than the product of any particularly strong political views. Paul Lendavi, *One Day That Shook the Communist World: The 1956 Hungarian Uprising and its Legacy*, trans. Ann Major, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2006), pp. 94-95

<sup>348</sup> What had seemed to be semi-successful negotiations had taken place the previous day at the Hungarian Parliament building, this second session was supposed to be to decide the time and place of a joint declaration of détente between the Soviet & Hungarian governments. Miklós Horváth, 'The Second Soviet Aggression: The First War between Socialist States', *Hungarian Revolution and War for Independence*, pp. 448-450

<sup>349</sup> 'Tabular Summary of Soviet Troops Participating in Hungarian Military Operations', *ibid*, p. 451

<sup>350</sup> Csepel – the island district of Budapest held out until the 11<sup>th</sup> due to its advantageous geographic position, as did the industrial city of Dunaújváros, Lendavi, *One Day that Shook the Communist World*, p. 149

<sup>351</sup> *Report on Hungarian Refugees*, Note by the Chairman of the Committee of Political Advisers, NATO, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1957, C-M(57)65, accessed via: [http://www.nato.int/nato\\_static/assets/pdf/pdf\\_archives\\_hungarian\\_revolution/20130904\\_C-M\\_57\\_65-ENG.PDF](http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_archives_hungarian_revolution/20130904_C-M_57_65-ENG.PDF)

Stalinist policy or to permit democratisation to develop... to a point which risks the complete loss of Soviet control of the satellites.<sup>352</sup>

The incident proved to most Western observers that the Soviet government would not countenance the existence of independent communist states in Eastern Europe and indeed would rather resort to violence and heavy handed repression than see a loss of influence in its satellite states. As a result of Hungary, the Kremlin's claim to any particular moral high ground in international affairs was sharply revealed as wholly false.

Such realisations proved to be particularly damaging to the British communist movement. Preconceptions concerning Soviet morality had been shattered, whilst the CPGB's fluctuating line on events demonstrated the Party's irredeemable sycophancy towards the USSR. Beyond this, the Hungarian revolution was defined by an inherent chaos, both the revolutionaries and Soviet government reacted to events rather than shaped them. As concluded by JIC analysis of the uprising, 'the Hungarian uprising is a spontaneous nation-wide revolt against Soviet domination and the Police State, with no unifying political principle and no integrating leadership'.<sup>353</sup> Nevertheless, reporting of the revolution within the pages of the *Daily Worker* consistently parroted the Soviet narrative of events and attempted create a linear account of the crisis. A decision which lead to increasingly absurd switches in editorial position. Indeed, so inflexible was the *Worker's* desire to cleave to Moscow's narrative that it actively censored or otherwise ignored reports received from its reporter in Hungary - Peter Fryer - which called attention to Soviet military brutality.<sup>354</sup> The initial line was one of wholesale condemnation:

'What has happened in Hungary during these past days has not been a popular uprising against a dictatorial Government. It has been an organised and planned effort to overthrow by undemocratic and violent means a Government which was in the process of carrying through important constructive measures to put right past mistakes and wrongs, and which has stated that it was unprepared for illegal armed attacks.'<sup>355</sup>

However, by October 30<sup>th</sup>, as Soviet forces began their initial withdrawal and it seemed plausible that Nagy's government may be recognised by Moscow as legitimate, there was a rapid switch in the *Worker's* position as the paper attempted to maintain credibility:

'It is now clear, despite the confused and incomplete picture, that counter-revolutionary actions and just demands of the people were both factors in the situation. The people had justified grievances which had been boiling up for a long time... The government did not take simultaneous measures to right the wrongs,

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<sup>352</sup> Alan Dulles to meeting of the US National Security Council, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1956, op cit. Victor Sebestyen, *Twelve Days: Revolution 1956*, (Hachette UK, London, 2010), p. 158

<sup>353</sup> 'Weekly Survey of Intelligence', No. 26, 28<sup>th</sup> October – 1<sup>st</sup> November 1956, CAB 179/13, op cit. Goodman, *Official History of the JIC*, p. 269

<sup>354</sup> 'Peter Fryer', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/100755>

<sup>355</sup> Editorial, *Daily Worker*, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1956

including those concerned with the living standards of the people... It is tragic that Soviet forces had to be called to upon to help the Government. Certainly no Russian soldier wants to be fighting anywhere. Soviet soldiers would sooner be in their own country enjoying the fruits of Socialism.’<sup>356</sup>

It was this brief window – between the 30<sup>th</sup> October and resumption of hostilities on the 4<sup>th</sup> November which undermined the CPGB’s authority through its insistence on cleaving to the Soviet narrative. The central problem was that the Moscow narrative was openly inconsistent and clearly reflective of indecision within the Kremlin. Indeed the Soviet response towards Hungary was openly contradictory. Notably, late on the 30<sup>th</sup> October the Soviet Union proclaimed the adoption of the ‘Declaration of the Government of the USSR on the Principles of Development and Further Strengthening of Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and other Socialist States’. The clumsily titled document stated clearly that ‘The Soviet Government is prepared to enter into the appropriate negotiations with the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic and other members of the Warsaw Treaty on the question of Soviet troops on the territory of Hungary’.<sup>357</sup> In other words indications on the evening of the 30<sup>th</sup> were that the Soviet government intended to negotiate with the Hungarian revolutionaries and potentially recognise their legitimacy – forcing a hasty retraction from the *Daily Worker* which had previously maintained the line that Hungary was under assault by fascist counter-revolutionaries. However, with the redeployment of Soviet troops to crush the revolt on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the paper’s position was forced to switch yet again. November 5<sup>th</sup> saw the *Worker* run the headline ‘New Hungarian Anti-Fascist Government in Action: Soviet Troops called in to stop White Terror’<sup>358</sup> followed by a printing of the Executive Council of the CPGB’s official statement:

‘Coming after the murder and lynching of Communists, the open hostility of the Nagy Government to the Soviet Union and the repeated concessions which it made to reactionary violence, Cardinal Mindszenty’s (anti-communist leader of the Catholic church in Hungary – who had been imprisoned and tortured by the Gerő government in 1948 and only released on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1956 following its capitulation) broadcast was the warning to all Hungarian patriots that the danger of fascism and Western intervention was acute... The choice for the Soviet forces was clear; whether to help the Hungarian Communists and Socialists fighting to prevent a return to fascism, or to stand by and watch Hungarian and Western reaction crush the Hungarian people... The Soviet Union in responding to the appeal made to them to help defend Socialism in Hungary, is also helping to defend peace and the interests of the world working class... The Executive Committee of the Communist Party considers that the new Hungarian Government and the action of the Soviet forces in

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<sup>356</sup> Editorial, *Daily Worker*, 29<sup>th</sup> October 1956

<sup>357</sup> ‘Declaration by the Soviet Government on the Principles of Development and further Friendship and Cooperation between the Soviet Union and Other Socialist States, 30<sup>th</sup> October 1956, as cited in *Documents on Foreign Relations, 1956*, (Harper & Brothers, New York, 1957), pp. 252-255

<sup>358</sup> Headline, *Daily Worker*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1956

Hungary should be supported by Communists and Socialists everywhere, and expresses to the Hungarian working people its solidarity with them in their fight against counter-revolution and reaction.’<sup>359</sup>

Such a wilful misrepresentation of the situation in Hungary by the Executive Committee proved a step too far for the consciences of many of its leading intellectuals. By issuing the statement the Executive Committee irrefutably proved that its first loyalty lay not to socialism and the interests of the international working class, but rather to Soviet policy and the Kremlin alone. It was plain to Western observers that the Hungarian revolutionaries were not fascists, reactionaries or counter-revolutionaries. They were typically dedicated communists who believed in a socialist state free from the control of Moscow. One only had to read the signatories to the list of revolutionary demands to realise this: the Hungarian Writers’ Union, Hungarian Academy of Letters and Science, Hungarian Artists’ Union etc.<sup>360</sup> All organisations of immense respectability for British communists and all, chillingly, groups and unions which members of the British communist intelligentsia would most likely have belonged had they resided in Hungary. As it was, the Executive Committee’s display of sycophancy towards Moscow sparked open revolt, the general feeling amongst many of its members perhaps best expressed through a letter – sent first to the EC on the 12<sup>th</sup> November, before being openly published in the *New Statesman* on December 1<sup>st</sup> following the *Daily Worker*’s refusal to print the document – by members of the Communist Party Historians’ Group:

‘All of us have for many years advocated Marxist ideas both in our own special fields and in political discussion in the Labour movement. We feel therefore that we have a responsibility to express our views as Marxists in the present crisis of international socialism. We feel that the uncritical support given by the Executive Committee of the Communist Party to Soviet Action in Hungary is the undesirable culmination of years of distortion of fact, and failure by British Communists to think out political problems for themselves. We had hoped that the revelations made at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union would have made our leadership and press realise that Marxist ideas will only be acceptable in the British Labour Movement if they arise from the truth about the world we live in. The exposure of grave crimes and abuses in the USSR and the recent revolt of workers and intellectuals against the pseudo-Communist bureaucracies and police systems in Poland and Hungary, have shown that for the past twelve years we have based our political analyses on a false presentation of the facts... If the left-wing and Marxist trend in our Labour movement is to win support, as it must for the achievement of Socialism, this past must be utterly repudiated. This includes repudiation of the latest outcome of this evil past, the Executive Committee’s underwriting of the current errors of Soviet Policy.’<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Statement by the Executive Committee of the CPGB on the Hungarian Revolution, as published in the *Daily Worker*, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1956

<sup>360</sup> ‘Manifesto of Hungarian Intellectuals’, first published in Hungarian newspaper *Szülő Földünk* (Homeland), 18<sup>th</sup> November 1956, translated into English and republished in *The Spectator*, 30<sup>th</sup> November 1956

<sup>361</sup> Statement by the Communist Party Historians’ Group, *New Statesman*, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1956

The letter was signed by some of the leading intellectuals of the British communist movement – including Eric Hobsbawm, Christopher Hill, Doris Lessing and Hugh MacDiarmid. Notably, John Savile and EP Thompson do not appear on the list of signatories – though this was a consequence of the fact that they had already been expelled from the Party by the time of the letter’s composition (as a result of the publication of the third volume of *the Reasoner* shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in Hungary) rather than a disagreement with its sentiment.<sup>362</sup> Equally, it should be noted that not all of the letter’s signatories split from the Party, Eric Hobsbawm in particular remained a member of the CPGB, it seems partially out of a sense of idealistic nostalgia, and by 1960 had been rehabilitated with Party leadership.<sup>363</sup> Nevertheless, with the exception of Hobsbawm the letter cemented the rift within the Party between its leadership and academic wing. As Gollan remarked to Bill Wainwright (assistant General Secretary from 1956 to 1959) in October 1957, ‘I would not invite Christopher Hill to a Party meeting if he were the last historian alive.’<sup>364</sup> By the time of the CPGB’s 25th National Party Congress in late April 1957, the Party had haemorrhaged some 7000 members – around a third of its total membership.<sup>365</sup> What Christopher Hill referred to as a ‘smug little world of our own invention’<sup>366</sup> had fallen apart. As a result of Hungary, and the CPGB’s subsequent mismanagement of its internal dissent, the well intentioned naivety which had supported intellectual interest in the communist movement collapsed. After 1956 it was no longer possible for intellectuals on the radical left of British politics to delude themselves that the Soviet Union offered any kind of moral leadership for the world.

### **Whitehall’s Influence in CPGB Dissent**

All of this was watched with pleasantly surprised interest by the Eden government. Regular updates concerning the *Daily Worker*’s reporting on Hungary appeared in the summaries of communist activity circulated to the AC (H) by IRD,<sup>367</sup> whilst MI5’s

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<sup>362</sup> *E.P. Thompson and the Making of the New Left*, ed. Cal Winslow, (Monthly Review Press, New York, 2014), p. 10

<sup>363</sup> MI5 report regarding Eric Hobsbawm, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1960, TNA, KV 2/3985

<sup>364</sup> John Gollan to Bill Wainwright, 24<sup>th</sup> October 1957, MI5 intercept, TNA, KV 2/3946

<sup>365</sup> Francis Beckett, *The Enemy Within*, (John Murray, London, 1995), p. 138

<sup>366</sup> Speech by Christopher Hill to 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPGB, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1957, as cited in IRD’s special report on ‘The Communist Party Congress’, date of circulation to AC (H) unknown (previous pages including date of report retained under Public Records Act), TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>367</sup> From October 1956 through 1958 each IRD briefing contained a separate section reporting on Hungary/Party dissent. See files TNA CAB 134/1341, CAB 134/1342 & CAB 134/1343



surveillance of leading communist intellectuals was inundated with records of letters and telephone conversations indicating the breakdown of Party unity – typically weeks before such dissent became widely known even within the Party itself.<sup>368</sup> By way of example – MI5 possessed the full text of the Historians’ Group letter as early as the 20<sup>th</sup> November – the day it was first received by members of Executive Council itself and a full fortnight before it was printed in the *New Statesman*.<sup>369</sup> Meanwhile – the Security Service was also aware even by the end of November that John Gollan (General Secretary of the CPGB following Pollitt’s resignation as a result of post-Hungary discontent)<sup>370</sup> had become so paranoid about dissent from what he termed ‘right-wing elements’ within the CPGB that he was calling in private for the ‘liquidation’ of dissenting voices in order to ensure the Party’s survival.<sup>371</sup> By late 1956, the Security Service’s surveillance of the CPGB was so all pervasive that the government often had a clearer and timelier picture of intra-Party politics than even the members of the CP’s Executive Council. As previously mentioned, the headquarters of the CPGB – at 16 King Street in London – was fully covered by listening devices, Home Office warrants for the interception of personal communications had been obtained for all its leading figures, some 90% of its membership had been positively identified and even John Gollan’s personal secretary, Julia Pirie, was in fact an MI5 agent.<sup>372</sup> Indeed, since 1955 MI5 coverage had only become more comprehensive. In mid-1955 the Service achieved another major coup against the CPGB, via a STILL LIFE operation codenamed PARTY PIECE. Following monitoring by F Division (Communism Home), MI5 became aware that a considerable quantity of Party membership records were stored at the house of the well-to-do communist Berger family in North-West London.<sup>373</sup> On learning that the Bergers took in lodgers, MI5 secured access by sending an officer to masquerade as a prospective tenant. Once the officer had convinced the family to allow him to rent a room on the top floor of the house, it was found that the property contained only a single staircase, which thus meant that the Service now had

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<sup>368</sup> For example see files TNA KV 2/3983 (Eric Hobsbawm), KV 2/3945 (Christopher Hill) & KV 2/4057 (Doris Lessing)

<sup>369</sup> Telephone intercept of conversation between John Campbell (then editor of the *Daily Worker*) and John Gollan during which the transcript of the Historians’ Group letter was read out shortly after arrival at CPGB headquarters, 20<sup>th</sup> November 1956, TNA, KV 2/3945

<sup>370</sup> John Mahon, *Harry Pollitt: A Biography*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1976), pp. 403-404

<sup>371</sup> Director General’s brief of CPGB activity, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1956, TNA, KV 2/3079

<sup>372</sup> Obituary of Julia Pirie, *Daily Telegraph*, 28<sup>th</sup> October 2008

<sup>373</sup> The patriarch of the family, Roland Berger, was under surveillance due to his role in the 1930s w/ the CPGB ‘agitprop’ department and warranted his own MI5 personal file. His wife was also a CPGB member and close friends with Betty Reid. Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), p. 400

access to the entire house via its embedded officer's key.<sup>374</sup> Whilst the family was away for a weekend retreat in the Lake District, A Division (General Services) officers were able to break into the property and copy some 55,000 files related to CPGB membership.<sup>375</sup> As remembered by Peter Wright (the ex-MI5 officer who later achieved notoriety on account of his conspiracy theory riddled memoir *Spycatcher*):

'PARTY PIECE gave MI5 total access to the Party organisation. Every file contained a statement, handwritten by the recruit, explaining why he or she wished to join the Party, accompanied by full personal details, including detailed descriptions of the circumstances of recruitment, work done for the Party, and contacts in the Party organisation. More important than this, the PARTY PIECE material also contained the files of covert members of the CPGB, people who preferred, or whom the Party preferred, to conceal their identities.'<sup>376</sup>

PARTY PIECE therefore eliminated those small gaps in coverage of the CPGB which had persisted since STILL LIFE began in the late 1940s. The acquisition of comprehensive details regarding the Party's covert membership in particular did much to reassure MI5 that comprehensive coverage of the Party had been achieved. Indeed, the only gap of note was the full identification of all those who had been involved in communist politics during the inter-war period. Such a task would not be accomplished until the late 1960s and the creation of the Universities Research Group.<sup>377</sup>

Given such a level of coverage Whitehall's knowledge of events is unsurprising. Interestingly however, Whitehall made little effort to capitalise upon the discord caused by 1956. The government to large extent was content to sit by and allow the CPGB to war amongst itself. Of course in the short-term, much of Whitehall was otherwise preoccupied with events in Egypt as the military elements of the Suez crisis unfolded concurrently with the Hungarian uprising.<sup>378</sup> Meanwhile, the debacle following the Crabb affair in April 1956 – during which MI6 had attempted to photograph the propeller of the Soviet cruiser *Ordzhonikidze* whilst docked in Portsmouth harbour, only to have its appointed frogman Lionel Crabb disappear mid-mission – meant that Eden was extremely leery of

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<sup>374</sup> Interview with Vicki Berger (daughter of Roland), as carried out by Christian Schlaepfer, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2012, op cit. Christian Schlaepfer, *Counter-Subversion in Britain, c. 1945-1962*, unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012, pp. 236-239

<sup>375</sup> Accounts here differ, Peter Wright remembers that such a task was accomplished over a single weekend. Christopher Andrew notes however that MI5's records show that the cataloguing of files in actuality took place over two separate weekends three months apart.

<sup>376</sup> Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer*, (Viking Penguin Inc., New York, 1987), p. 55

<sup>377</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 440

<sup>378</sup> Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*, (I.B. Tauris, London, 2011), pp. 332-515

authorising any further direct covert action on British soil.<sup>379</sup> Beyond these factors however, official inertia would seem to have been as much a failure to comprehend the significance of Hungary for the domestic communist movement as it was a conscious decision. AC (H) commentary from 1957 seems to have regarded Party upheaval caused by the revolution as a fairly transient event. The Committee fretted in August that:

‘With memories of the Hungarian rising beginning to fade, there was a danger that communist influence in the unions might again increase. It was very important, therefore, that the momentum of the anti-communist campaign should be maintained.’<sup>380</sup>

Though, as shall be discussed shortly, the CPGB’s industrial membership was the section of the Party affected least by events in Hungary, it is notable that less than 12 months after the revolution’s occurrence officials believed that the event was already declining in relevance. With this in mind, the failure to exploit post-revolutionary malaise as part of wider anti-communist strategy becomes more understandable. Action on Hungary was taken - the Home Office in particular was heavily involved in the resettlement of refugees from the conflict, facilitating the immigration to the UK of some 20’000 persons by October 1957 & aiding the passage of a further 25’000 to Canada,<sup>381</sup> however there is no evidence to suggest that such actions were subsequently utilised for propaganda purposes by IRD, or indeed any other government department. Governmental reporting of the events of 1956 as well as the dissent they caused within the CPGB’s intelligentsia was remarkably passive. Whilst the government had sought to direct a particularly aggressive campaign of counter-subversion against communist intellectuals in the early ‘50s, it made little effort to capitalise upon the Communist Party’s internal turmoil in the wake of 1956.

This being said, it is likely that attempts at exploitation would have produced negligible benefit. So inept was the CPGB Executive Council’s management of its membership’s discontent that it is hard to see what greater benefit counter-subversive action could have achieved. Even a cursory glance at the body’s statements makes it clear makes it clear that many of the problems it experienced could realistically have been avoided had John Gollan et al merely chosen to take a less combative line. The EC’s attitude was one of only token reconciliation – its unwillingness to brook meaningful debate over policy

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<sup>379</sup> Richard J. Aldrich & Rory Cormac, *The Black Door: Spies, Secret Intelligence and British Prime Ministers*, (William Collins, London, 2016), pp. 187-191

<sup>380</sup> Minutes from meeting of the AC (H), 29<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>381</sup> ‘Statistical Return For Information of the Home Office’, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1957, TNA, HO 352/142

within the Party confirmed with the issuance of a general letter to all CPGB members in May 1957, whereby it was stated:

‘The adoption of the principles of the Majority Report on Inner-Party Democracy... made clear the firm adherence of the party to the principles of democratic centralism. Congress... decisively rejected all forms of factionalism, campaigning on inner-party questions outside the structure of the party, the counterposing of membership and leadership and other questions which would have weakened the strength and effectiveness of the party... It would be a mistake however to imagine that the attempts to disrupt the party will be abandoned... An organized effort is being made by people hostile to the party, open Trotskyists and some ex-members, to draw party members into their circle by persuading them to participate in ‘independent’ journals or ‘discussion forums’ run under their auspices for the purpose of attacking Marxism-Leninism, the international communist movement and the Communist Party.’<sup>382</sup>

The EC chose to adopt a position of total hostility towards dissidents within the Party. The ‘Minority Report’ – which presented the position of those dissenting academics and intellectuals at the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress and essentially called for more open debate to be permitted by the EC – was entirely ignored; leading directly to the resignation of Christopher Hill, who had been one of its main architects and proponents.<sup>383</sup> Meanwhile, the EC’s decision to castigate individuals such as Saville & Thompson – not to mention the 7000 others who had left the party between November 1956 and May 1957 – as Trotskyists and wreckers, served only to ensure that the damage wrought to the CPGB’s intellectual base by 1956 was rendered irreparable.<sup>384</sup> Under the circumstances, it is difficult to see what Whitehall could have done to ensure that the disenfranchisement of radical leftist intellectualism from the British communist movement would be more complete. The near-total removal of intellectual communism as a security concern for the government was the result of internal dissent within the CPGB as brought about by Khrushchev’s denunciation of Stalinism in the February of 1956 and the brutal repression of the Hungarian revolution by Soviet troops in the latter part of that year rather than a product of propaganda or covert action on the part of the government. Official counter-subversion policy did very little to either directly help or hinder this schism. Somewhat ironically, one could make the argument that the Kremlin inadvertently was far more responsible for the marginalisation of communism in Britain than the British government.

### **Confidence in Positive Vetting**

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<sup>382</sup> ‘On the Significance of the 25<sup>th</sup> Congress and the Next Steps for the Party in Carrying Out the Policies Agreed’, Open letter from the Executive Committee of the CPGB to the membership, *The Newsletter* (Peter Fryer’s post-Hungary newspaper), May 31<sup>st</sup> 1957

<sup>383</sup> ‘Christopher Hill’, *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/89437>

<sup>384</sup> The Party went into slow, but terminal, decline from 1956 until its formal dissolution in 1990, Eaden & Renton, pp. 185-186

Even with all this in mind however, given the progress of the official investigation into Soviet espionage within British intelligence (ongoing since Burgess and Maclean's defections in 1951) it is still remarkable that officialdom diminished its focus on intellectual communism by such a notable amount post-1957. By the mid '50s MI5 had established fairly clearly the narrative behind the pair's flight – dating back to their recruitment in the 1930s. Moreover, the Service had also by this point correctly identified the role of Kim Philby in the whole affair as well as his links to the wider communist movement, even though it still could not prove this. Investigations at this point were more hampered by the fact MI6 was openly hostile to accusations that one of its own could be a traitor (and remained unconvinced of Philby's guilt until 1961 and the defection of KGB major Anatoliy Golitsyn):<sup>385</sup>

'In the summing up of the case by the Security Service which was agreed with my predecessor... it was stated of the case against PEACH that... "It is not for the Security Service to pass judgement on a case which it cannot prove; investigation will continue and one day final proof of guilt or innocence may be obtained". I understand that the Security Service stand by the views expressed in their previous summing up... I am copying this letter to Roger Hollis.'<sup>386</sup>

This being said, the Service had still not yet fully grasped the full scale and extent of Philby's activities. Most notably, the Service failed to connect 1955 VENONA decrypts of KGB messages (largely due to lack of analytical staff),<sup>387</sup> dating from September 1945, with Philby. The messages concerned the activities of a long-standing Soviet agent referred to as STANLEY, in relation to 'events in Canada in the line of the Neighbours' work.'<sup>388</sup> Given the timing and reference to 'the Neighbours' (the KGB euphemism for its military intelligence counterpart the GRU) the messages evidently referred to the Gouzenko case. Meanwhile importantly, the only two SIS officers aware of the Gouzenko case in September 1945 were its then Chief – Sir Stewart Menzies – and Kim Philby. An awareness of this link would have greatly improved MI5's case against Philby in the late 1950s. Unfortunately however, the significance of the STANLEY decrypt was only realised on re-examination by the Service in 1965.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Philby Affair: Espionage, Treason, and Secret Service*, (William Kimber, London, 1968), pp. 57-58

<sup>386</sup> Letter from Sir John Sinclair (Head of SIS) to Sir Patrick Dean (Chairman of the JIC), 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1955, TNA, FO 158/28

<sup>387</sup> By the end of 1950 the number of British cryptanalysts working full-time on VENONA numbered less than 10. By contrast, the number of individuals employed at Bletchley Park by the end of the Second World War numbered close to 10,000. Aldrich, *GCHQ*, pp. 62, 80

<sup>388</sup> VENONA decrypt, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1945, op cit. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 431

<sup>389</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 432

However, by 1957 the Service was at least aware of the circumstances of Burgess and Maclean's recruitment by Soviet intelligence and was equally conscious of Philby's similar communist links during the 1930s. In many ways the recruitment and subsequent activity patterns of Philby, Burgess and Maclean (and indeed Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross) were classic examples of Whitehall's worst fears regarding subversion. All had been first exposed to communism primarily through their undergraduate experiences at Cambridge in the 1930s, whilst all had first been recruited to as Soviet agents via third party subversive groups. Philby's path to recruitment by Soviet intelligence was a textbook example of the way in which subversive activity could eventually lead to espionage. Following exposure to communist groups in Cambridge, Philby joined the front organisation World Federation for the Relief of German Fascism in 1933 on the advice of the Cambridge Marxist economist Maurice Dobb - described by MI5 as having been 'a powerful influence in stimulating communism at the University during the 1930s'.<sup>390</sup> As a direct result of his involvement with the group, Philby met his first wife and fellow communist Litzi Friedmann in Vienna in February 1934 through whom he was introduced first to Edith Tudor-Hart and subsequently Arnold Deutsch – who recruited him to the NKVD in the June of that year.<sup>391</sup> Maclean had followed a similar path – being heavily involved in communist politics as an undergraduate student, which led to his meeting and being recruited by the Soviet agent Theodore Maly, again in 1934.<sup>392</sup> Burgess similarly had been active in student communism and was also recruited by Deutsch in the later months of 1934. The introduction of all to Soviet intelligence was facilitated by their prior involvement in subversive groups. Though the full details of each individual's activities were still yet to become known to the British government (the exact timeline of Philby's recruitment in particular proved difficult to establish), those facts which had been discerned by the mid-50s appeared to provide ample justification for many of the counter-subversion measures which had been introduced since the late 1940s. Therefore, it is on first examination perhaps odd that 1957 should have seen a wholesale shift away from monitoring communism in the universities and white-collar professions given the evidence emerging from the Cambridge spy ring investigations. Explanation is provided partially by the government's over-confidence in its security procedures. By the mid-50s,

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<sup>390</sup> MI5 assessment of Maurice Dobb, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1952, TNA, KV 2/1759, Philby, *My Silent War*, p. 232

<sup>391</sup> Ben Macintyre, *A Spy Among Friends: Kim Philby and the Great Betrayal*, (Bloomsbury, London, 2014), pp. 40-41

<sup>392</sup> Robert Cecil, *A Divided Life: A Biography of Donald Maclean*, (Bodley Head Ltd., London, 1988), p. 35

the government was reasonably confident that the introduction of positive vetting measures since 1951 would prevent the reoccurrence of a similar incident. A 1954 FO report requested by Sir Patrick Dean examining the potential impact positive vetting procedures would most likely have had on Philby's employment lays the salient points out well:

'I think there is no question at all that provided the positive vetting procedure had been fully carried out... Peach's background could not possibly have remained concealed. It is clear that he was recruited into SIS on an "old boy" basis, that he told the grossest lies at the time of his recruitment and that if investigations had been made these lies would have been revealed. Field enquiries would certainly have been made in Cambridge. These would have revealed that while at the University Peach was a militant Communist. His tutor... described him in exactly these terms and stated that he had "extreme views on social questions"... Field enquiries would also have revealed that Peach's first wife was a Communist when he married her in 1934 and that after their separation he remained friendly with her until 1945... [Helenus Milmo's investigation for MI5 concluded] that Peach had for many years been a Soviet agent, that he had a thoroughly Communist background at Cambridge, that he had deliberately and grossly lied about his background when he was recruited into SIS... There is therefore to my mind no doubt that the positive vetting procedure, carefully and thoroughly applied, would have shown up Peach as a person wholly undesirable on security as well as general grounds for any position of trust in the Government service'<sup>393</sup>

Of course, subsequent experience would prove that positive vetting was not a sure-fire measure for preventing espionage. John Vassall was positively vetted in the mid-50s, yet was successfully able to hide his homosexuality (a secret which in turn led to his blackmail by Soviet intelligence), Michael Bettaney was vetted multiple times during his employment with MI5 during the 1980s,<sup>394</sup> Geoffrey Prime by GCHQ in 1966,<sup>395</sup> Aldrich Ames by the CIA in the mid-1960s,<sup>396</sup> Robert Hanssen by the FBI in 1976,<sup>397</sup> Edward Snowden in 2006 etc.<sup>398</sup> Nevertheless, during the mid-1950s Whitehall seemed to have felt that positive vetting would prevent the occurrence of further spy scandals akin to the magnitude of the Cambridge spies (a delusion shortly to be shattered in the early '60s).

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<sup>393</sup> Report by Sir Arthur de la Mare (Head of FO Security Department) to Sir Patrick Dean, 7<sup>th</sup> April 1954, TNA, FO 158/28

<sup>394</sup> *Report of the Security Commission*, Command Paper 9514, (HMSO, London, 1985)

<sup>395</sup> 'Geoffrey Arthur Prime: Security Commission Report to the House of Commons', 12<sup>th</sup> May 1983, Hansard, Vol. 442, cc699-702WA

<sup>396</sup> *Report of Investigation into the Aldrich Ames Case*, Report by the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, US House of Representatives, 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, (Government Printing Office, Washington DC, 1994)

<sup>397</sup> *A Review of the FBI's Performance in Deterring, Detecting, and Investigating the Espionage Activities of Robert Philip Hanssen*, August 14<sup>th</sup> 2003, Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Justice, accessed via: <https://oig.justice.gov/special/0308/index.htm>

<sup>398</sup> Transcript of 'Safeguarding our Nation's Secrets: Examining the Security Clearance Process', 20<sup>th</sup> June 2013, Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Federal Programs and the Federal Workforce and the Subcommittee on Financial and Contracting Oversight, US Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs, US Senate, retained online at: <http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/subcommittees/fpfw/hearings/examining-the-workforce-of-the-us-intelligence-community-and-the-role-of-private-contractors>

Nevertheless, in the mid-1950s positive vetting still appeared to be functioning as intended. Moreover, as previously discussed, the level of coverage of CPGB activities achieved by MI5 by 1955 meant that British intelligence appeared able to accurately identify potential communist subversives. Therefore, although the Burgess, Maclean and Philby cases in many ways appears to justify earlier fears concerning subversion as a facilitator of espionage, a switch in focus away from treating subversion as fundamentally an espionage-related problem still occurred due to perhaps misplaced confidence on the part of the government that post-1951 vetting measures would more than adequately guard against any repeat scandals.

### **Counter-Subversive Policy Frustration in Industry**

As a consequence of the turmoil suffered by the CPGB in the wake of Hungary, from 1957 onwards intellectual communism within the UK essentially disappeared from the Macmillan government's list of subversive concerns. Though MI5 continued to maintain files on many of the intellectuals who had formally left the Party, regular discussion of communism within academia, science and the teaching professions ceased at a Cabinet committee level from mid-1957.<sup>399</sup> Instead, attention became almost overwhelmingly towards the question of communist activity within the trade unions. This being said, concerns over communist activity within the unions had never really ebbed since the early 1950s, as despite overwhelming evidence that strike action was almost never a product of communist instigation, ministers continued to fret that industrial militancy and communist infiltration went hand in hand. Anthony Eden in particular, following his elevation to Prime Minister in April 1955, remained convinced that strike action must be the result of communist agitation. Strikes at the Hawker Aircraft factory in Blackpool and Rolls Royce plant in Glasgow provoked particular tension between the PM and those departments responsible for monitoring industrial relations. Eden was especially keen to issue public statements denouncing the actions as communist plots – much to the dismay of the Department of Labour and Security Service. MI5 counselled that at Hawker 'until recently there has been little evidence of direct communist activity in this strike' and that of the 3000 employees involved only three were actual communists, with another two sympathisers.<sup>400</sup> The proportion of communists in Glasgow was slightly greater – some

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<sup>399</sup> From TNA, CAB 134/1343 there is no further discussion at the Cabinet committee level regarding 'intellectual' communism, excepting discussion of so-called 'dissident' communism.

<sup>400</sup> 'Strikes at Hawkers, Blackpool and Rolls Royce, Glasgow. Situation Report on 11.11.55.', Section A 'Strike at Hawkers, Blackpool', Report by the Security Service, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1955, TNA, PREM 11/1031



200 employees out of a total of 7500 – but again the root cause was a wider dispute over wages, with the strike officially backed by the non-communist Amalgamated Engineering Union.<sup>401</sup> The Ministry of Labour's advice was blunt:

'The Ministry of Labour point out that there is always some sort of industrial grievance associated with the strike, even where individual Communists are involved and perhaps taking a leading role... There is a very real danger that Government statements impugning the motives of men on strike or suggesting that they are mere dupes will have the opposite effect than that intended... The Hawker strike which has now ended was made official by a number of the unions concerned, whilst the Rolls Royce strike is in process of being made official the unions involved. Clearly, these unions would strongly resent that their actions were Communist-inspired... It would be very easy for public utterances by Government spokesmen to do more harm than good.'<sup>402</sup>

Eden's frustration with this advice is apparent, to the Security Service he complained 'Do we ever speak out about all this?'<sup>403</sup> Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour received the sullen response of 'The Prime Minister noted that it was thought inexpedient to speak out now, but doubted whether the arguments for not speaking out would hold good for the future. On day, he said, they will not suffice'.<sup>404</sup> Despite Prime Ministerial reticence, the Security Service consistently stressed that communist policy on strike action was geared towards exploitation rather than instigation – almost every study compiled since 1947 had indicated that this was the case.<sup>405</sup> Retrospective analysis undertaken by the Security Service at the time again confirmed this theory communists had far greater interest in effecting control over the union movement than utilising it as a tool of short-term economic disruption. The conclusion of MI5's report examining industrial unrest over the period 1953-1955 (published in early 1956) stated that:

'On first sight it might seem curious that while strikes were often instigated and maintained by individual Communists, the Party, as a Party, played little, if any part in them. But although not opposed to strikes as an instrument of policy, they judged everything in terms of tactical expediency. At present they were concentrating on penetration and control of the trade union movement rather than in fermenting industrial unrest. By doing so, they doubtless hoped that it would assist them to extend their influence among the left wing of the Labour Party, to establish themselves as a respectable political party independent of Moscow control, and thus to create some form of popular front.'<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> Section B, 'Strike at Rolls Royce Glasgow', Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> R.R. Pittam (Principal Private Secretary to the Home Secretary) to N.F. Cairncross (Private Secretary to Anthony Eden), 28<sup>th</sup> November 1955, TNA, PREM 11/1031

<sup>403</sup> N.F. Cairncross to R.R. Pittam, 16<sup>th</sup> November 1955, TNA, PREM 11/1031

<sup>404</sup> Cairncross to Pittam, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1955, TNA, PREM 11/1031

<sup>405</sup> The key exception to this was Sir Percy Sillitoe's report to the Home Secretary (David Maxwell Fyfe) in 1952, which claimed that the CPGB was seeking strike action wherever possible, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 408

<sup>406</sup> 'Industrial Unrest 1953-1955: The Role of the Communist Party', Memorandum by the Security Service, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

As such, it was far more important to work to frustrate the means by which communists gained control over trade union executive councils than it was to tar strikers as the stooges of subversive malcontents. Fortunately, Sir Norman Brook possessed greater sense than the PM in this regard. As such, the AC (H) adopted the same conclusions as the Service as to where industrial counter-subversive policy should be best targeted:

‘The main difficulty was to stop the political apathy which existed amongst the non-Communist rank and file. The Communist Party geared their whole machine to securing the election of their candidates, and this effort was not matched on the other side... Moreover, it was likely that the majority of the rank and file would not be prejudiced against a leader merely because he was Communist, so long as he gave proof of effective leadership.’<sup>407</sup>

Again, MI5 had stressed this point to Eden during his time in office – estimates provided to the PM in 1956 calculated that only around 1 in 500 trade unionists was an avowed communist, however that the Communist Party was thought by that point to control ‘the Executive Committees of three trade unions; and thirteen general secretaries and at least one in eight full-time officials.’<sup>408</sup> Fortuitously, Eden’s apparent inability to grasp the nature of the CPGB’s industrial strategy proved to be of minor importance in the long run – the Suez debacle soon served to captivate Prime Ministerial attention, whilst Eden’s resignation, and subsequent replacement as PM by Harold Macmillan, in January 1957 removed the issue as an ongoing concern.<sup>409</sup>

These episodes under Eden’s tenure illustrate well how British intelligence and the Civil Service sought to resist politicisation of counter-subversive policy, even in the face of Prime Ministerial disagreement. Where ministers were typically guided by more immediate political concerns – in this case it would have been highly expedient for Eden to be able to blame strike action solely on the actions of hardened militants – the Security Service recognised that for counter-subversive policy to be successful in the long run, the temptation to indulge in such scapegoating had to be resisted.

### **Communism in Industry post-1956**

This was ultimately just as well, for communist influence in the unions remained a concern even post-Hungary. The tumult of 1956 failed to undermine communist influence in industry the same way as it had amongst the more intellectual wing of the movement.

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<sup>407</sup> Comments of Sir Norman Brook to meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> April 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>408</sup> ‘Communist Influence in Industry and Trade Unions’, Summary of MI5 report by Sir Norman Brook to Anthony Eden, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1956, TNA, PREM 11/1238

<sup>409</sup> A combination of stress, exhaustion and ill health forced Eden to retire in January 1957, Robert Rhodes James, *Anthony Eden*, (Weidenfeld & Nicholson, London, 1986), p. 582

Despite the mass exodus of intellectuals from the CPGB and British communist movement more generally post-1956, communists within the trade unions largely retained their loyalties to both Party and ideology. The Security Service's 1957 assessment of communism within the trade unions (commissioned in large part to assess the impact of 1956's upheaval)<sup>410</sup> summated the situation thusly:

'The reaction of the trade union wing to the Stalin issue was one of bewilderment rather than resentment and, after an initial period of doubt, the trade union leaders were content to leave the issue to be resolved by the party leadership.... [As a result of Hungary] the B.C.P. leadership took a calculated risk and called upon the top flight of communist trade unionists to announce in the *Daily Worker* their continued allegiance to the party... The gamble came off as no union has yet imposed any new ban, and the party, at the cost of serious losses among rank and file trade union members, has emerged with its industrial leadership substantially intact.'<sup>411</sup>

Indeed, the Party was to an extent riven along class lines post-'56, as the trade unionist wing of the CPGB saw the turmoil caused by Hungary as an opportunity to secure control over the direction of British communism whilst marginalising the distrusted bourgeois intelligentsia who had previously dominated the Party.<sup>412</sup> Ergo, though the appeal of communism to academics, scientists, teachers and so forth was a problem which had essentially resolved itself, communist influence in industry was an issue which still required further official attention.

Direct options for countering communist influence within the unions continued to be limited however. Not least because officials were still terrified of the political fallout should Security Service monitoring of trade unionists have become publically known. Though MI5 undoubtedly represented the greatest official repository of information concerning communist aims and tactics, the information it possessed had to be managed very carefully. Information procured by the Security Service concerning Trade Unions was of tremendous importance to Whitehall in so far as it illuminated communist designs and capabilities – however, the continual need to protect the sources of such information meant that its exploitation for counter-propaganda purposes relied upon close liaison with IRD.<sup>413</sup> As such, the Department continued to be essential to domestic counter-subversion efforts, a fact which has been often missed in previous histories of the period.<sup>414</sup> Its

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<sup>410</sup> Introductory note regarding Security Service report on Communism in the unions, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>411</sup> 'The British Communist Party's Reaction to the Growth of Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', Note by the Security Service to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>412</sup> Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p. 138

<sup>413</sup> 'Liaison between the Foreign Office and the Security Service', Minute from meeting of the AC (H), 29<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>414</sup> Even Aldrich & Cormac's 2016 work, *The Black Door* neglects this point

usefulness as a domestic asset had grown tremendously since its teething problems with circulation rates in 1953. As was made clear by an August 1957 report concerning the IRD's performance from 1954 to the spring of 1957, the Department's influence had grown significantly over the course of the 1950s:

'The methods of operation used by I.R.D. during the period had proved very successful. In particular, the technique of writing or helping to write booklets about communism which were then published by outside bodies had been used to good effect; and in the trade unions excellent results had been obtained by the launching of the periodical IRIS and by inspiring the Daily Mail to spotlight the scandals in the Fire Brigades Union. It was also satisfactory, although in some ways surprising, that these successes had been achieved without I.R.D. coming to public notice.'<sup>415</sup>

That IRD continued to escape public notice was a particularly welcome asset for the Macmillan government. Given that much of the Department's role involved liaison with a variety of private individuals –including journalists, trade unionists and academics – it is remarkable that the department continued to function without its existence becoming more widely known.<sup>416</sup> The utility this granted to officials was assisted by the fact that IRD continually operated effectively with a minimal investiture of both personnel and budget. Despite a growth in workload, the English Section (the name is misleading – the section's remit included the entirety of the United Kingdom) continued to be staffed by a mere two civil servants, one on rotation from outside the Foreign Office, the only addition since 1951 the acquisition of the services of a 'student advisor' for matters pertaining to the universities.<sup>417</sup> Whilst the Security Service's role in British counter-subversion strategy had necessitated an increase in both budgetary allowance and personnel requirement,<sup>418</sup> IRD's English Section required remarkably few resources in order to prosecute its campaign of counter-propaganda. This combination of continued discretion and relative affordability helps to explain the confidence with which the Foreign Office's 1957 report on the English Section was able to conclude:

'I do not recommend any change in the existing methods used to counter Soviet influence in the UK. Given the limitations on what IRD can do at home, and the need for discretion in doing it, the present methods have worked well. No doubt they can be further refined and new fields may be found in which to apply them: but no major changes in technique or emphasis seem necessary.'<sup>419</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, 1954 – Spring 1957', Memorandum by the FO, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>416</sup> Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, p. 195

<sup>417</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, 1954 – Spring 1957', Memorandum by the FO, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>418</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 328

<sup>419</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office, 1954 – Spring 1957', Memorandum by the FO, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

As things were, the main difficulty encountered by IRD post-1953 was securing the cooperation of union leadership. Whilst anti-communist trade union leaders were typically grateful for any information passed on by the government, there was also a degree of pride in their attitude towards counter-subversion action in the unions - 'They regard this as very much their battle and although they were very woolly about what they were going to do about it they seemed quite clear that they did not want any Government pronouncements or speeches to deal with the threat of Communism in the trade unions.'<sup>420</sup> The political considerations of government/union relations meant that any counter-subversion actions attempted had to be enacted that much more delicately than had been the case in Whitehall's previous major anti-communist campaigns. The introduction and steady tightening of vetting procedures had been a relatively simple matter by comparison given its 'in-house' nature, whilst counter-subversion efforts directed against the communist intelligentsia had not carried nearly the same weight of political disaster should evidence of official meddling have been uncovered. The AC (H) was heartened therefore to be informed in late July 1956 of the formation of 'Industrial Research and Information Services Limited' (henceforth IRIS) – a private company founded and run by trade unionists (including Jack Tanner – the former President of the AEU & past President of the TUC – as well as William McLaine, former TUC Assistant General Secretary)<sup>421</sup> for the explicit purpose of countering communist designs in the union as well as encouraging the 'full and constitutional working of trade union organisations.'<sup>422</sup> Here was an organisation which seemed to bridge the problems which had vexed officialdom since the early 50s. Firstly, as a company both founded and run by trade unionists it had the potential to correct the political apathy amongst the majority of workers which Whitehall believed facilitated communist gains. Secondly, as a firmly private organisation, it gave the government a means of ensuring the plausible deniability it craved. IRIS gave the Macmillan government an immediate route through which IRD (and thus by proxy MI5) material could be routed on a regular basis to trade unionists with relatively little official exposure. Indeed, the use of IRIS for counter-propaganda efforts produced immediate positive results – demonstrating the veracity of Whitehall's suspicion that communist gains amongst trade unionists were typically a result of political

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<sup>420</sup> 'Communism and the Trade Unions', Memorandum by Iain Macleod, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>421</sup> 'Information Research and Information Services Ltd. "IRIS"', Note by the Secretaries to the AC (H), 12<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>422</sup> Ibid.

disinterest rather than wide-spread hard-left sentiment (by way of example, only 9% of the eligible membership elected to vote in the AEU's 1959 general elections).<sup>423</sup> MI5's 1957 report concluded that:

'The party owes much of its past success in the unions to superior organisation contrasted with wide-spread apathy. In recent months two new factors have emerged; communist trade union activity has received more frequent and sharper comment in the press and radio, and inside the unions anti-party organisations – notably Industrial Research and Information Service – have exerted more influence on union elections. These developments have been stimulated and assisted by information and advice from IRD, and they are now causing the party considerable concern... They are particularly worried by the amount of information IRIS has been able to obtain, but they appear to have no idea of its sources nor do they attribute any official backing to it.'<sup>424</sup>

In particular, the greater organisation of counter-propaganda efforts facilitated via the utilisation of IRIS's contacts and capabilities was directly attributed to helping break communist control of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) via utilisation of contacts in the *Daily Mail*, Association of Scientific Workers (AScW) and to the failure of the communist electoral campaign within the Amalgamated Engineering Union.<sup>425</sup> As an aside, it is interesting to note that IRD's collaboration with the *Daily Mail* coincided with communist historian Eric Hobsbawm's own partnership with the newspaper. Hobsbawm published a series of jazz reviews in the newspaper under an assumed name during the late 1950s, much to the chagrin of the CPGB when this fact was eventually discovered by the Party in 1959.<sup>426</sup> To return to the main point, there was perhaps an a certain amount of wishful thinking on the part of the Macmillan government as to IRIS' utility – the decline of communist influence within the AScW in particular was almost certainly significantly linked to the retirement of its honorary General-Secretary W.A. Wooster, a committed communist who had helped lead the union since the mid-1930s, rather than a sudden change of opinion caused by an official counter-propaganda offensive.<sup>427</sup> Nevertheless, such communist losses cannot wholly be discounted as unrelated to the government's renewed counter-propaganda efforts – utilisation of the state-private network approach as facilitated via IRIS did produce positive results, thereby helping to further convince officials that communism within industry could be contained via counter-propaganda efforts alone.

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<sup>423</sup> 'Communism in the Trade Unions', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>424</sup> 'The British Communist Party's Reaction to the Growth of Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', Note by the Security Service to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>425</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 29<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>426</sup> MI5 intercept, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1959, TNA, KV 2/3985

<sup>427</sup> William Styles, *The World Federation of Scientific Workers: A Case Study of Soviet Front Organisations*, unpublished MPhil dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2013, pp. 54-56

However, whilst organisations such as IRIS (and similar think tank-esque groups such as ‘Economic League’, ‘Common Cause’ and ‘Aims of Industry’)<sup>428</sup> provided more avenues for the dissemination of counter-propaganda, none were able to provide a solution to the problem of how to increase anti-communist sentiment amongst those unions which had tended to resist official counter-propaganda efforts in the past. The NUM a case in point:

‘The most important union where IRIS had failed to make headway was the National Union of Mineworkers, but this could be accounted for largely by the fact that some of the officials of this Union, and in particular its general secretary, Arthur Horner, being themselves communists, were naturally unsympathetic towards it.’<sup>429</sup>

Similar outcomes were experienced with regards to both the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) as well as within the shop stewards.<sup>430</sup> In those areas where either governmental information was too sensitive to be released counter-propaganda efforts had only a limited capacity for success. For example, in the case of the ETU, where due to MI5’s desire to protect its sources of information allegations of communist cheating in union elections were next to impossible to prove openly. Also, the shop stewards, which had a significant communist makeup yet could not be confronted directly for fear of undermining their role in underpinning the authority of the Trades Union Congress.<sup>431</sup> Governmental counter-subversion capabilities with regards to trade unionism continued to be restricted to reactive measures only. Whitehall was able to respond to opportunities for propaganda victory when they presented themselves, but equally was unable to independently generate such opportunities without outside stimulus. Indeed, Cabinet officials were typically resistant to calls for more aggressive measures. When the FO complained in 1959 that public awareness of communist infiltration had not automatically lead to greater anti-communist voting in union or elections (or often greater voter turnout at all), the response from the AC (H) was firm:

‘The only action we could take was to keep up the pressure on them [communists] through publicity... Persuading members to vote in union elections was not a matter for Her Majesty’s Government; this was a problem which could only be tackled, and solved, by the leaders of the Labour movement. The most that Her Majesty’s Government could do was to make this fact clear to the Labour leaders.’<sup>432</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> All groups with similar aims to IRIS – though smaller & with less government involvement. Common Cause was absorbed into IRIS in 1959, Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?*, (Routledge, London, 2003), p. 69

<sup>429</sup> ‘Report on Progress in Encouraging Anti-Communist Propaganda in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 17<sup>th</sup> July 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 8<sup>th</sup> December 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>432</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1344

At the Cabinet committee level Whitehall continued to maintain a firm sense of its own constitutional limitations – it was committed to playing only an advisory role in anti-communist actions within the unions. It was the aforementioned ETU electoral fraud case which would test official limitations to their utmost. July 1956 saw the Security Service report to the AC (H) that it had obtained evidence of communist cheating during elections for the Electrical Trades Union which had led to the appointment of a communist as Assistant General Secretary.<sup>433</sup> Such a development would not necessarily have been cause for concern in of itself had it not undermined the central preconception which official understanding of communist strategy in the unions had been predicated upon. Namely, it had been assumed up until 1956 that communists for the most part would stop short of illegal practice in the pursuit of their goals – favouring continued legality over short disruption. The consequences of MI5's discovery were potentially grave:

‘The long term significance of these developments is plain and does not need to be underlined. Control of an important Trade Union places in the hands of the Party the power to paralyse the nation's economic life, together with large funds, a widely circulating magazine which can be converted into a propaganda organ, the opportunity to spread Marxist doctrines through union training courses and an immensely influential pressure group to give backing to the Party's political programme’<sup>434</sup>

This being said, the revelation brought with it a significant silver lining – if proof of communist cheating could be made public, it would provide the government with the ideal means to decimate communist influence in the unions that officials had long pined for. This the government already knew, for trade union leaders had said as much during their meeting with the Minister of Labour in July ‘Union leaders told me that one ounce of real proof of Communist cheating in AEU or other trade union ballots would be more valuable than any number of speeches’.<sup>435</sup> Initial response was muted – preoccupied more with preventing contagion across the wider engineering unions by spreading news of the fraud, whilst ensuring that the exact provenance of the information remained secret. As put:

‘There was no security reason why the Minister [of Labour – then Ian Macleod, future editor of *The Spectator* & very briefly Chancellor of the Exchequer under Ted Heath]<sup>436</sup> could not discuss the position in confidence with Carron, the new President of the A.E.U. [the Amalgamated Engineering Union – with whom the ETU was closely linked & would eventually merge in the early 90s]... In any discussions which

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<sup>433</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>434</sup> ‘Industrial Unrest 1953-1955: The Role of the Communist Party’, Security Service conclusions regarding the ramifications of communist control of a major union, p. 9, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>435</sup> Report by Iain Macleod to the AC (H) regarding meeting held with Sir Vincent Tewson (General Secretary of the TUC 1946-1960), Sir Tom Williamson (incoming President of the TUC) & Mr. Heywood (TUC General Council – first name unknown), 5<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>436</sup> Within a month of becoming Chancellor Macleod died as a result of a massive heart attack, Robert Shephard, *Iain Macleod*, (Hutchinson, London, 1994)



took place it was important to avoid giving the impression that the large amount of information available about Communist influence in the Unions came direct from the Security Service.’<sup>437</sup>

It was not until late 1957 that official attempts to expose foul play in the ETU began to gain real traction. The autumn of that year saw former communist and long-time ETU man Leslie Cannon attempt to run for a position of the Executive Council of the union. Despite narrowly winning the contest, in the aftermath the union’s Executive chose to disallow on technical grounds the votes in a number of branches where Cannon had won a majority – reversing the result.<sup>438</sup> Following this, an emergency meeting of the Union’s Rules Revision Conference to ensure that no legal challenge could be made in the aftermath.<sup>439</sup> In many ways Cannon provided an ideal public champion to front government efforts at rolling back trade unionist communism. A prodigal son like figure, Cannon had been a full member of the Party since 1939, growing steadily more disillusioned with its overt hypocrisy during the 1950s before quitting in 1956.<sup>440</sup> He was also popular within the trade union movement more widely, having worked in heavy industry since his youth across a variety of sectors. Charismatic, hard-nosed and proudly working class, he possessed both the personal toughness to weather any CPGB propaganda war directed against him as well as the credibility required to win over wider union support.<sup>441</sup> As such, the episode provided the government the excuse it needed to begin to whittle away at the ETU Executive’s position. Therefore, it is here that the value of earlier official efforts to cultivate contacts within the wider union movement and journalistic profession bore fruit. By early 1957 the ETU was steadily becoming the subject of not insignificant press interest thanks to concerted efforts by both MI5 and IRD.<sup>442</sup> In the spring of that year, the Security Service noted that Cannon was swiftly becoming the focal point of communist opposition within the union, passing the information on to IRD who proceeded to tip off the editors of both the *News Chronicle* (bought out and absorbed by the *Daily Mail* in 1960)<sup>443</sup> and *Star* (London evening newspaper which ceased publication in 1960 – not to be confused with the contemporary

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<sup>437</sup> Minutes of meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>438</sup> Glyn Powell, ‘Turning Off the Power: The Electrical Trades Union and the Anti-communist Crusade 1957-61’, *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 18 Issue 2, 2004, p.12

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Olga Cannon & J.R.L. Anderson, *The Road from Wigan Pier*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1973), p. 129

<sup>441</sup> Ibid, pp. 53-57

<sup>442</sup> Powell, ‘Turning off the Power’, p. 8

<sup>443</sup> York Membury, ‘Who Killed the News Chronicle?’, *British Journalism Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 2010, p. 66

*Daily Star* tabloid) newspapers that Cannon may be willing to supply information regarding communist malpractice at the heart of a major British trade union.<sup>444</sup> Subsequently, the papers began publishing a regular stream of articles based on information received from Cannon attempting to prove that communists on the Executive Council had been engaging in electoral gerrymandering in 1956. Affairs at the ETU were therefore already of media interest – it was only following reports that Cannon’s election had been actively obstructed through underhanded tactics that the union became front-page news however.<sup>445</sup> Indeed such was the furore surrounding the scandal that a decision was taken by BBC Panorama to commission a full programme on the union (this in of itself testament to the power of the story – at the time the BBC was dependent on ETU members for many of its technical requirements & therefore was wary of alienating the union)<sup>446</sup> – which was duly broadcast in December 1957. Following prompting by the IRD, IRIS volunteered its services as a consultant for the programme – thus meaning that much of the material used in the episode’s production was supplied by the government indirectly.<sup>447</sup> Matters were also helped by the fact that the presenter – Labour MP Woodrow Wyatt – had been a regular beneficiary of information previously circulated by IRD.<sup>448</sup> Indeed, Wyatt was an extremely important contact for IRD, due to the fact that his dual roles as an MP and presenter of Panorama made him an extremely well-known public figure with significant influence over the course of public discourse.<sup>449</sup> The programme succeeded in advancing the government’s position on two fronts – firstly, the broadcast itself was captivating and sensational enough to ensure that public attention would remain fixated on the union:

‘The fact that a number of the E.T.U. members whom he [Woodrow Wyatt] interviewed insisted on having their faces obscured and voices distorted, for fear of reprisals by the Executive, made it all the more dramatic and compelling. A week later Wyatt dealt with the subject again. The Communist leaders of the

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<sup>444</sup> ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 16<sup>th</sup> February 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>445</sup> ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 4<sup>th</sup> November 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>446</sup> Hugh Purcell, *A Very Private Celebrity: The Nine Lives of John Freeman*, (Biteback Publishing, London, 2015), p. 118

<sup>447</sup> ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 16<sup>th</sup> February 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>448</sup> In particular, IRD had assisted Wyatt with the circulation of his publication *The Peril in Our Midst*, (Phoenix House, London, 1956), an anti-communist polemic which warned of the Communist menace lurking within trade unionism. Surprisingly, the book is still available for purchase via Amazon. ‘Report on Progress in Encouraging Anti-Communist Propaganda in the Trade Unions’, note by the FO to the AC (H), 17<sup>th</sup> July 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>449</sup> ‘Woodrow Wyatt’, *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/68841>

union declined to appear, saying they would only do so if they were allowed to present their case without commentary being made on it and on the understanding that they would not be questioned.<sup>450</sup>

Secondly, it served to reign in further short-term communist activity on the part of the union Executive – the Security Service noting that the publicity had left ‘E.T.U leaders badly shaken... they will be careful not to act in such a way as to revive it.’<sup>451</sup> Although Whitehall continued to be frustrated by its inability to directly counter communist subversion within industry, the episode did prove that by cultivating media attention and providing a steady stream of low level information it could ensure that when communist malpractice did occur openly, it would be both noticed by the national press and elevated to the level of national scandal. By June 1959 the FO were able to report that:

‘The publicity campaign on this subject [communism in the trade unions] has continued to go well; the topic is now generally accepted as ‘news worthy’ by all major UK dailies and weeklies due largely to the slogging match in the Electrical Trades Union between the Communist Executive and the dissidents. Communist activities in less spectacular unions – e.g. the Civil Service Union – now arouse immediate public interest.’<sup>452</sup>

By December 1959 it was clear that the CPGB was firmly on the defensive as several ETU branches went into open revolt across the country from early 1958.<sup>453</sup> Meanwhile, the editorial line of the communist press made the level of discomfiture being inflicted by the publicity campaign clear, as the paper began declaring repeatedly that Fleet Street was the single greatest enemy of the communist cause.<sup>454</sup> Whilst counter-propaganda and information dissemination proved ineffective at directly countering communism, it did prove extraordinarily helpful in fostering anti-communist sentiment within the national press and thereby general populace. In the short term, Whitehall’s counter-communist strategy in the trade unions experienced only limited success – however in the long-term they helped to fundamentally undermine the ideology’s foothold in organised labour by steadily whittling away at public apathy and helping to ensure that British media opinion was firmly anti-communist. In doing so the government helped create the popular sentiment required to ensure that the marginalisation of communist sentiment in the

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<sup>450</sup> ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 16<sup>th</sup> February 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>453</sup> The regional branch representation which came out against the ETU executive was spread evenly across the country. Branches included: Hertford, Liverpool, Port Talbot, Doncaster, Rotherham, Basingstoke & Weymouth to name but a few. ‘Communism in the Trade Unions’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 16<sup>th</sup> February 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>454</sup> E.g. ‘Anti-Communist Propaganda’, *World News*, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1958

unions would be near-total following the case's progression to a civil trial in 1961 – as shall be discussed in the next chapter.

### **Communism in the Media**

With regards to the transmission of the BBC Panorama programmes on communist malpractice in the ETU, it is interesting to note the level of official interest its broadcast caused. Greater curiosity regarding how film and television might best be exploited as a facet of counter-subversion rose exponentially over the late 1950s – the FO was asked to consider how best 'sound and television broadcasting' could be used as a means of reducing communist influence, whilst media output in general began to be scrutinised to a far greater extent than it had been in the past. In past years, attention had mainly been paid to those media outlets which were obviously and overtly instruments of the Soviet government – a case in point being the TASS Agency (the Soviet foreign broadcasting agency) monitoring station at Whetstone in North London. A relic of the Second World War, the station had come to British governmental attention following concerns raised by the air ministry in 1950 that the facility could be used to monitor operational messages relayed by Fighter Command during exercises, whilst also serving as a means for the easy broadcast of pro-Soviet programming.<sup>455</sup> After considerable deliberation and disagreement across Whitehall (MI5 in particular were unconvinced by the Air Ministry's argument)<sup>456</sup> by not only the fledgling AC (H), but also JIC the station was forcibly closed in late 1951, ending the matter.<sup>457</sup> Since that point however, explicit discussion regarding broadcasting matters in relation to counter-subversion policy had been few and far between, excepting routine communication with the BBC on the part of the Security Service to ensure the Corporation was not inadvertently exploited as a platform for the broadcast of communist ideas.<sup>458</sup> The later '50s however exhibited far greater official interest in broadcasting as a facet of counter-subversion policy – particularly film and television. Such a change appears to have been prompted by overtures from the Foreign Office in 1957 to begin resumption of what were described as 'unostentatious cultural

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<sup>455</sup> 'TASS Agency Radio Monitoring Station', Note by the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>456</sup> Minutes of the 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>457</sup> 'TASS Monitoring Station Closed', *The Manchester Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1951

<sup>458</sup> The most notable BBC-related discussion concerned a report on communists in the Corporation, which was prepared by the AC (H) in 1953 at the request of Winston Churchill. Frustratingly however, the report is currently still withheld from the public domain. Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 4<sup>th</sup> May 1953, TNA, CAB 134/738

contacts and exchanges with the Soviet bloc' – which had been formally suspended since the Hungarian Revolution.<sup>459</sup> Though the British public were already exposed to a not insignificant amount of pro-Soviet propaganda by this point – Radio Moscow broadcast freely in the UK, whilst the *Daily Worker* was freely available as was formal propaganda circulated by the Soviet embassy (all with negligible effect on public opinion) – the request does seem to have caught official attention to the extent that the profile of broadcasting concerns was significantly raised in meetings of the AC (H) thereafter.<sup>460</sup> The report concluded with the following:

'In exchanges with the Iron Curtain however, which it will probably not be possible to limit entirely to the unobtrusive variety, there is naturally the risk of increased influence by Soviet, Satellite and Chinese propaganda, whether through Khrushchev on television screens, a flattering reception of visitors to the Soviet Union, the impact of visiting Communist from the Soviet Union, or the artistic virtues of musical and other entertainments. The Committee may therefore like to take note of the general picture and in particular its likely impact on the home front.'<sup>461</sup>

Limiting exchanges with the Soviet Union to the 'unobtrusive variety' was difficult enough for officials when the state fully controlled the means of media production and dissemination. However, the advent of private television in the UK (ITV & its subsidiary news network ITN were founded in the spring of 1955)<sup>462</sup> complicated matters. Such a loss of state control could prove problematic. For example, in late 1956 when ITN in combination with its London contractor, Associated Rediffusion, attempted to negotiate with Soviet television authorities to secure exchange and broadcasting rights in their respective countries.<sup>463</sup> Negotiation attempts ended (perhaps inevitably) as follows:

'Associated Rediffusion had made an agreement with Soviet Radio under which each party undertook not to exhibit and programme to which the other objected. But whereas the Russians were interested mainly in the propaganda value of such exchanges, Associated Rediffusion were concerned with the popular appeal of the programme to be shown in the United Kingdom; and they had consequently got themselves into the unfortunate and ill-considered position whereby they had agreed to show in this country a programme extremely favourable to the Soviet viewpoint, and to a programme extremely unfavourable to ourselves being shown in the Soviet Union.'<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> 'Cultural Contacts and Exchanges with the Soviet Bloc', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 20<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>460</sup> The subject came up at all subsequent meetings of the AC (H) until the conclusion of MI5's investigation of the BFI in 1960, see files TNA CAB 134/1342 – CAB 134/1345

<sup>461</sup> 'Sound and Television Exchanges between the BBC and Independent Television and Soviet Radio', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 20<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>462</sup> Geoffrey Cox, *See It Happen: The Making of ITN*, (Bodley Head, London, 1983), p. 5

<sup>463</sup> 'Sound and Television Exchanges between the BBC and Independent Television and Soviet Radio', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 20<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>464</sup> Statement by F.R.H. Murray (FO) to the AC (H), 29<sup>th</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

Here again was an example of the difficulties Whitehall faced in attempting to formulate effective counter-subversion policy outside of those sectors it directly controlled. Whilst the BBC could be coerced and directed fairly straightforwardly into avoiding broadcasting pro-communist programming (indeed the BBC willingly collaborated with the government on matters related to communist subversion),<sup>465</sup> private companies could not be as easily guided into toeing the governmental line on communism. Though ITN's negotiations were undoubtedly benignly intentioned, nonetheless they had inadvertently provided an avenue for the broadcast of communist propaganda in the United Kingdom (though it must be stressed, to a comparatively tiny audience – households with access to the new channel in 1956/57 numbered somewhere around 500'000).<sup>466</sup> A similar event occurred in mid-1959 when the British Film Institute (BFI) consented to the screening and distribution of a pair of East German propaganda films designed to 'discredit and weaken NATO and Western Germany'.<sup>467</sup> The films, entitled 'Holiday in Sylt' (depicting German repression of the Warsaw uprising) and 'Operation Teutonic Sword' (a documentary which claimed to prove that General Hans Speidel – then Supreme Commander of NATO ground forces in Central Europe – had played an instrumental role in the assassinations of King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister Louis Barthou in 1934)<sup>468</sup> had been exhibited at a special exhibition of foreign cinema at the BFI's National Film Theatre in late 1958 by Plato Films – a British-based company which specialised in the distribution of communist films (other works produced by the company include 1951's 'Coventry Greets Stalingrad' and 1954's imaginatively titled 'Labour Delegation meets Mao Tse-Tung').<sup>469</sup>

The central problem for the government was two-fold – firstly, the BFI then as now received a significant public subsidy leaving Whitehall open to the allegation that it was indirectly funding the dissemination of communist propaganda within the United Kingdom.<sup>470</sup> Secondly, given that the films had already been exhibited in Britain, it was difficult to make the argument that they should not receive wider circulation to 'ordinary'

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<sup>465</sup> See for example evidence of direct BBC/MI5 correspondence contained within Hobsbawm's personal file. Serial 363a, 4<sup>th</sup> January 1960, TNA KV 2/3985

<sup>466</sup> Estimate by the Broadcaster's Audience Review Board & Joint Industry Committee for Television Audience Research, accessed via: <http://www.barb.co.uk/resources/tv-ownership/>

<sup>467</sup> 'Communist Films', Memorandum by the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>468</sup> Speidel went on to successfully sue Plato Films in the British courts, see *Plato Films Ltd v Speidel* [1961] AC 1090

<sup>469</sup> BFI Company listing, accessed via: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/films-tv-people/4ce2b947b353b>

<sup>470</sup> 'Communist Films', Memorandum by the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA CAB 134/44

cinemas.<sup>471</sup> On the second point – it is interesting to note still just how wary officials were of propaganda causing a mass surge of pro-communist opinion amongst the general British public. Despite the fact that all evidence suggested that the British populace were overwhelmingly at most apathetic to the ideology - CPGB membership had declined steadily since 1945, as had its share of the popular vote - the national press was reliably anti-communist. Meanwhile, MI5 had reduced its earlier wartime contingency estimates to the extent that a mere 110 British subjects would have been detained should the hostilities with the Soviet Union have commenced (in addition to 11 foreign nationals).<sup>472</sup> Hardly a sizeable fifth column given years of tolerated pro-Soviet propaganda by the *Daily Worker* and Radio Moscow – officials still fretted that pro-communist propaganda could unleash some here-to-fore unseen Marxist zeal amongst the public. Indeed such was the concern amongst members of the AC (H) that the Security Service was immediately tasked with compiling a report on the extent of communist infiltration within the BFI.<sup>473</sup> Meanwhile, the Director of the BFI (film administrator James Quinn)<sup>474</sup> was also contacted directly to provide assurances that he was aware of the dangers of communist propaganda and to vouch for the moral character of his staff.<sup>475</sup> Whilst it would appear that the investigation was carried out with discretion, there are somewhat uncomfortable echoes of McCarthyite Hollywood present here – the BFI asked to account for the showing of films outside the government’s definition of political acceptability. Though the full report concerning MI5’s investigation into the BFI remains classified, the AC (H) commentary indicates (perhaps predictably) the futility of the entire exercise:

‘The Security Service would expect their normal cover of the Communist party to have revealed any significant Communist activity in a body such as the British Film Institute. But they have never had any such indication. In addition, they had now made this intensive study of the British Film Institute itself and of those individuals closely connected with the running of it. They still had not found any signs of significant Communist influence in the BFI... The Committee agreed that there was no need for them to pursue the question of Communist influence in the BFI any further.’<sup>476</sup>

Even despite all available evidence being to the contrary – the British government at a Cabinet committee level continued to be deeply concerned that communist propaganda

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<sup>471</sup> Discussion of AC (H) regarding ‘Communist Films’, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959, TNA CAB 134/1344

<sup>472</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 406

<sup>473</sup> Discussion of AC (H) regarding ‘Communist Films’, 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959, TNA CAB 134/1344

<sup>474</sup> Influential Director of the BFI from 1955 to 1964, went to serve on the BBC general advisory council, British Council Film Board and was a trustee of the Imperial War Museum. Obituary of James Quinn, *The Guardian*, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2008

<sup>475</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>476</sup> Comments of Brigadier W.M.T. Magan (Security Service) to the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> March 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

had the capacity to significantly impact upon public opinion. The old trope of communist machinations being able to manipulate a populace into unthinking obedience refused to fade away. Whilst Whitehall assessments from a multitude of departments were ultimately reaching the conclusion that communism was a declining threat to British stability and security, nonetheless officials remained paranoid that communist influence could gain traction at any point if left unmonitored and unchecked. Whilst MI5 may have been confident that the problem was well in hand - Roger Hollis (Director General of the Security Service since 1956) was assured enough to state firmly to the Home Secretary Rab Butler in 1960 that 'On the subversive side I thought we had the British Communist Party pretty well buttoned up'<sup>477</sup> – the BFI incident demonstrated that ministers remained convinced that communism presented a real and immediate threat to the security of the United Kingdom even as late as 1959.

### **Attitudes to the Non-Communist Left**

Though old – and increasingly unfounded - fears concerning communist influence may have remained strong, official attitudes towards the radical left as a whole displayed considerably greater nuance. As a result of the mass defections from the CPGB post-1956, from 1957 onwards considerably greater governmental attention began to be applied to the question of the subversive potential of the hard-left as a whole. Though IRD included a short report on what it termed "'Dissident" Communist activities in Britain' with its briefing packet for June 1957 (which mainly remarked without comment on the sudden spate of new left-wing publications such as *The New Reasoner* and *Universities and Left Review* which had sprung up since the Hungarian uprising)<sup>478</sup> official attention was not really captured until early 1958. Official interest appears to have been piqued by the inclusion of a *London Times* editorial dating from February 1958 speculating on the future of the circa 8000 former communists who had left the CPGB since 1956. Included in the AC (H) briefing packet for that month, the article speculated that:

'A large proportion of them [former CPGB members]... have probably disappeared from the political scene... Some will have had only a short time in the party and were glad to leave it without attracting attention. Others, after a score or more of dedicated years, broke with the party with much anguish of spirit and grimly turned their backs on politics... Political forums founded in the wake of Hungary have now

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<sup>477</sup> Roger Hollis to Rab Butler, early 1960, as cited in Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 410

<sup>478</sup> "'Dissident" Communist activities in Britain', Note by IRD within its monthly memorandum 'Communist-Influenced Activities in the United Kingdom' for June 1957, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342



served their purpose as transit camps for ex-Communists on their way to other sections of the Labour movement. Possible more lasting in their influence will be the various publications which have sprung up with ex-Communists grouped round them... Much more influential is the well-produced four shilling quarterly 'The New Reasoner', edited by the Yorkshire university rebels Mr. Saville and Mr. Thompson... Their circulation is approaching 3000. An intellectual rival is 'The Universities and Left Review'.<sup>479</sup>

Though with the benefit of historical hindsight the article was wrong on many points – former communists retained their appetite for politics, leading directly to the genesis of the 'New Left', a school of political thought which attempted to bridge the gap between increasingly defunct Marxism-Leninism and the labourite tradition,<sup>480</sup> the attention of the AC (H) appears to have been captured by the report, most likely due to the speculation that many ex-CPGB members would in all probability migrate to other sections of the Labour movement, potentially causing trouble in the process. September 1958 saw the publication of an IRD report concerning 'Dissident Communist Activities in Britain, 1956 – 1958',<sup>481</sup> which categorised the ex-communists as belonging to two separate and distinct groups. The first, 'Trotskyists and neo-Trotskyists', – were defined as those who may have broken from the CPGB yet retained the same adherence to dogma, rigidity of thought and penchant for entryism as those who still retained their Party loyalties (what was termed by the IRIS sponsored 1958 anti-communist polemic *The British Road to Stalinism* as 'boring from within').<sup>482</sup> The second group meanwhile received the title of 'creative Marxists', defined as being:

'Far more radical in their approach, rejecting out of hand much of the claptrap accepted by Communists and Trotskyists alike. They reject, not only the bureaucracy of Moscow, but the whole concept of a rigidly controlled party, and they are trying to reshape their familiar ideology along sound Marxist principles but in an atmosphere of free intellectual discussion.'<sup>483</sup>

Again, John Savile and E.P. Thompson were singled out for special mention, with the *New Reasoner* (successor magazine to the ultimately short-lived *Reasoner*) being deemed the flagship publication for the latter group.<sup>484</sup> The emergence of such groups presented the government with a quandary. On the one hand, these individuals had for varying lengths of time been members of the Communist Party of Great Britain and in select cases

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<sup>479</sup> *The Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1958, as cited in IRD briefing packet under heading 'Former Communists', 12<sup>th</sup> March 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>480</sup> Michael Kenny, *The First New Left: British Intellectuals after Stalin*, (Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1995), pp. 199-211

<sup>481</sup> 'Dissident Communism in Britain', Supplement to IRD briefing packet for August 1958, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>482</sup> Francis Williams, *The British Road to Stalinism*, (IRIS, London, 1958), Foreword

<sup>483</sup> "'Dissident" Communist activities in Britain', Note by IRD within its monthly memorandum 'Communist-Influenced Activities in the United Kingdom' for June 1957, 12<sup>th</sup> July 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>484</sup> Ibid.

even attracted the attention of the Security Service, such was the potential danger their views had appeared to pose. On the other hand, much of the premise of Britain's post-war counter-subversion strategy had been predicated on the argument that communism and communists ultimately posed a danger due to their capacity for exploitation by Soviet intelligence and not due to the substance of communist views in of themselves. Initial wariness related to the adoption of a wide-ranging counter-subversion programme in the late 1940s had largely centred on the point that it was not the government's place to engage in political witch-hunting and that individuals should be deemed 'subversive' only if their actions could be said to pose a genuine threat to the security or stability of the United Kingdom. The Security Service in particular had set great store by the fact that it was even-handed in its approach to assessment and surveillance – radical leftist sympathies did not in of themselves warrant a threat to the State if they were unconnected with Soviet communism. An excellent example of this in practice can be found in the vetting report for the author and playwright JB Priestley, compiled by MI5's F Division in 1956 following a request by the Foreign Office to investigate Priestley prior to being offered a position as a British Council lecturer:

'J.B. PRIESTLEY can be fairly described as a Socialist whose first fine fervour has been tempered by reflection on the events of the past twenty years. He has been associated with a number of left-wing and quasi-Communist organisations, usually in the role of champion of individual rights, but his association therewith has been that of an independent left-wing liberal whose conscience seems to be answerable not to any political party, but rather to the radical tradition as he conceives it.'<sup>485</sup>

As has previously been examined, the Security Service were anxious to avoid any political bias of the sort which had tarnished the reputation of the FBI during the McCarthy years. As Priestley's vetting report shows, an adherence to radical leftist politics was not necessarily a qualifying factor to label someone as a 'subversive' as long as such sympathies were isolated from communism. With the advent of a post-communist radical left in Britain following 1956, the government was placed in the uneasy position of having to reassess the premise of its counter-subversion policy – did the radical non-communist left now pose a threat and if so to what extent? As it was, monitoring remained consistent, if low level, from the August of 1958 onwards. Certainly the matter of British Trotskyism required little official action. Even by the summer of 1959 the movement was 'discredited, though not yet entirely scotched'.<sup>486</sup> Given that the Trotskyists – centred around *The Newsletter* journal, edited by *Daily Worker*'s former

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<sup>485</sup> Security Service vetting report for FO regarding J.B. Priestley, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1956, TNA, KV 2/3775

<sup>486</sup> Minutes from meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

Hungary correspondent Peter Fryer, and the fledgling ‘Socialist Labour League’ (a group which would eventually morph into the more well-known Workers Revolutionary Party in the early 1970s)<sup>487</sup> – were essentially stricken by the same doctrinaire attitude as the CPGB, their lack of general popularity or wider influence is perhaps unsurprising. The movement according to official estimates amounted to at most no more than a thousand members scattered throughout the United Kingdom.<sup>488</sup> Indeed it could easily be argued that the emergence of a formal Trotskyist organisation did the ideology’s sympathisers more harm than good – most had quietly existed under the umbrella of the Labour Party since the collapse of the short-lived Revolutionary Communist Party in the late 1940s.<sup>489</sup> The emergence of the Socialist Labour League however gave the Labour Party an entity to formally proscribe – in the process expelling a significant number of entryists who had joined Labour after the RCP’s dissolution in 1949.<sup>490</sup> Official governmental action was limited to furnishing the Labour Party with an in-depth IRD analysis of the SLL.<sup>491</sup> As had been proven in the past, when confronted with hard-left entryists within mainstream leftist politics the Labour Party often provided the best means of ensuring their marginalisation.<sup>492</sup>

Considerably more complicated was the official reaction to what it had termed ‘Creative Marxists’, or what would now be recognised as the fledgling New Left – which would grow to become highly influential on both sides of the Atlantic over the course of the 1960s. It is possible to see a certain amount of admiration in the governmental line on the movement circa 1948 – comments such as ‘rejecting out of hand much of the clap-trap accepted by communists’ and ‘trying to reshape their ideology... in an atmosphere of free intellectual discussion’ demonstrating at least a begrudging respect.<sup>493</sup> As the New Left began to become more closely associated with the growing anti-nuclear movement however, official opinion soured considerably. By the late ‘50s possession of nuclear weaponry was still considered to be integral to British national security. Indeed, in an era

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<sup>487</sup> Corinna Lotz & Paul Feldman, *Gerry Healy: A Revolutionary Life*, (Lupus Books, London 1994), p. 262

<sup>488</sup> ‘Trotskyism in Britain’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>489</sup> Lotz & Feldman, *Gerry Healy*, pp. 212-213

<sup>490</sup> ‘Trotskyism in Britain’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> June 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>491</sup> Ibid.

<sup>492</sup> Peter Weiler, *Labour and the Cold War*, (Stanford University Press, California, 1988), pp. 277-279

<sup>493</sup> ‘Dissident Communism in Britain’, Supplement to IRD briefing packet for August 1958, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

where significant defence cuts were having to be made, expenditure on nuclear development was rising.<sup>494</sup> As stated within the 1957 White Paper on defence:

‘While Britain cannot by comparison [with the United States] make more than a modest contribution, there is a measure of agreement that she must possess an appreciable element of nuclear deterrent power of her own. British atomic bombs are already in steady production and the RAF holds a substantial number of them. A British megaton weapon has now been developed. This will be tested and thereafter a stock will be manufactured.’<sup>495</sup>

November 1957 saw the successful testing of the first British hydrogen bomb in a test codenamed ‘Grapple X’ – meaning that the UK was now the world’s third nation to possess the capability to design and manufacture thermonuclear warheads.<sup>496</sup> Meanwhile, the scale and collateral damage caused by American nuclear testing in the mid-50s had finally granted impetus to the British anti-nuclear movement – which had been essentially stagnant since 1948 and the public announcement of British nuclear development.<sup>497</sup> In particular, the aftermath of the 15 megaton US ‘Bravo’ shot at Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 1954, led to significantly higher levels of public concern over nuclear testing and weaponry. The test – the largest ever conducted by the US military – inadvertently covered the crew of the Japanese fishing vessel ‘Lucky Dragon’, moored some 85 miles (well outside the officially mandated exclusion zone) from the drop site, with high levels of radioactive fallout – leading the entire 23 man crew to fall ill with acute radiation sickness by the time they returned to the port of Yaizu in south-eastern Japan.<sup>498</sup> A formal complaint to the UN was filed by the Japanese government; and for the first time there began to be widespread international appreciation of nuclear warheads’ sheer destructive potential beyond immediate explosive capability.<sup>499</sup> By 1957, the British anti-nuclear movement had finally begun to gain a measure of political significance, the Direct Action Committee being formed in April of that year – with its more publically well-known cousin the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament coming into existence in January 1958.<sup>500</sup> Both groups fell outside of Whitehall’s understanding of the political spectrum. The Labour Party had rejected

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<sup>494</sup> John R. Walker, *British Nuclear Weapons and the Test Ban 1954-1973*, (Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2010), p. 23, spending on civil nuclear defence fell markedly however, see Matthew Grant, *After the Bomb: Civil Defence and Nuclear War in Britain, 1945-68*, (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), p. 115

<sup>495</sup> *Defence: Outline of Future Policy*, Cmd. 124 (HMSO, 1957)

<sup>496</sup> Walker, *British Nuclear Weapons*, p. 27

<sup>497</sup> Henry J. Steck, ‘The Re-Emergence of Ideological Politics in Great Britain: The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’, *The Western Political Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 1, (March 1965), pp. 88-89

<sup>498</sup> David M. Blades & Joseph M. Siracusa, *A History of US Nuclear Testing and its Influence on Nuclear Thought, 1945–1963*, (Rowman & Littlefield, Maryland, 2014), p. 61

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62

<sup>500</sup> Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 111

unilateral disarmament during its Brighton Conference in October 1957 – from which came Aneurin Bevan’s famous line that to disarm Britain’s nuclear arsenal would be akin to making future Foreign Secretaries walk ‘naked into the international conference chamber.’<sup>501</sup> British communism meanwhile was also hostile to unilateralism in the late ‘50s – true to form, the CPGB continuously advocated the line adopted by Moscow that the only true solution to nuclear tension was multilateral disarmament.<sup>502</sup> Indeed, throughout the mid-1950s the CPGB exercised its influence within the trade union movement (and thus, by proxy, inside the Labour Party) to ensure that all resolutions at annual conferences in favour of unilateralism were blocked – for example, in 1956, ’57 and ’58, block voting on the part of the Electrical Trades Union was used at both annual meetings of the Trades Union Congress and also Labour Party to support their respective leadership’s multilateralism.<sup>503</sup> As it was, the natural home for unilateralist sympathies was within the New Left movement – separate from both established wings of the left and also crucially outside of the full understanding of the government’s counter-subversive planners. Indeed, both the Foreign Office and Security Service advocated the view that the unilateralist movement would have been easier to understand and control had there been clear evidence of communist control.<sup>504</sup>

The rise of unilateralism beyond the communist movement presented a clear problem for Whitehall. With the British government’s continued committal to the maintenance of a nuclear and thermo-nuclear arsenal as a central component of defence policy, the rise of such sympathies could be interpreted as a direct threat to national security. However, the threat was still not as clear cut as the British communist movement had been, nor indeed were counters to the movement as (in hindsight) straightforward. The CPGB was an essentially rigid and strictly hierarchal institution. The anti-nuclear movement meanwhile was not, rather it was comprised of individuals with a variety of political outlooks – former communists in part, but also Quakers (Horace Alexander, Ruth Fry & Laurence Hansman), philosophers (Bertrand Russell), members of the pacifist movement (Hugh Brock), leading historians (A.J.P Taylor) and so on. Moreover, whilst many anti-

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<sup>501</sup> Aneurin Bevan, Speech to the 1957 Labour Party Conference, op cit. John Callaghan, *The Labour Party & Foreign Policy: A History*, (Taylor & Francis, London, 2004), p. 225

<sup>502</sup> Paul Anderson & Kevin Davey, ‘Moscow Gold? The True Story of the Kremlin, British Communism and the Left’, *New Statesman & Society*, Vo. 8, Issue 347, April 1997, p. 34

<sup>503</sup> Frank Parkin, *Middle Class Radicalism: The Social Bases of the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1968) .p. 165

<sup>504</sup> Ministerial summary of Security Service Report ‘Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-Measures’, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

communist measures had been justifiable as prudent precautions to safeguard against the designs of Soviet intelligence, the idea of expanding officialdom's counter-subversive focus to non-communist groups again raised the spectre of British intelligence being used to enforce political orthodoxy. Hennessey provides an apt summary of the situation, stating that 'In a strange way, both MI5 and the CPGB knew where they stood with each other. Their struggle had been continuous... since July 1920... By 1957 however, both Party and Security Service had to face a new phenomenon which left both, initially, somewhat surprised and baffled.'<sup>505</sup> As was perhaps typical, Whitehall were initially puzzled by the emergence of what increasingly seemed to be a new subversive threat of relative significance & equally perplexed as to how best counter it. Moreover, the importance of groups such as CND and the wider New Left was not to be a passing phenomenon. Particularly as a result of the Labour Party's resounding defeat at the October 1959 general election (its third successive loss), a crisis of confidence opened within the broader left which would allow for the flourishing of these new groups outside the traditional boundaries of the Labour movement. The late '50s therefore marked the beginning of a new chapter in British counter-subversion policy, even if it was not apparent at the time. Between 1945 and 1959, the British government had essentially considered the term 'subversive' to be synonymous with 'communist'. In future, Whitehall would be forced to diversify its focus, definition of and approach towards the concept, as experiences over the course of the early 1960s would demonstrate.

## **Summary**

May 1955 – October 1959 was a period of tremendous significance for British domestic counter-subversion policy and indeed the British communist movement more generally. It was in this period that Whitehall shifted its focus away in earnest from communism within the intelligentsia and white-collar professions, as had been the overriding preoccupation since 1947, and instead began to regard communists within the trade unions as the most pressing domestic subversive threat. Meanwhile, though many of the long-running problems which had vexed counter-subversion policy makers since Attlee continued to trouble the Eden and Macmillan governments – not least the relatively limited options available when dealing with communism in the private sector – the late

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<sup>505</sup> Hennessey, *The Secret State*, p. 107

'50s were also defined by considerably greater official confidence in the effectiveness of counter-communist measures than had been exhibited during the previous ten years of post-war efforts. The steady build-up of MI5's network of CPGB surveillance and informants, coupled with the breakthrough provided by PARTY PIECE, meant that by 1955, available intelligence on the movement had become near comprehensive, granting Whitehall a steady comprehensive stream of information concerning covert communist intent and capability which had been previously lacking. Meanwhile, the interior strife caused within the CPGB over the period of 1956 to 1957 as a result of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, Soviet repression of the Hungarian revolution and chronic mismanagement of discontent by the Party's Executive Council served to reinforce official hopes that communism's influence was rapidly declining. Even despite continuing disquiet regarding Burgess, Philby and Maclean, such was official faith in the strength of positive vetting procedure and MI5 surveillance that concern regarding historical Soviet espionage did not translate into any especially significant rise in anti-communist measures either within academia or the civil service. The collapse of British intellectual communism following 1956, combined with a pervasive Security Service surveillance network, meant that the government could finally lay to rest the ghosts of the Gouzenko affair and Fuchs scandal. By the late '50s it appeared clear to officials that the chances of a network of highly placed intellectual subversives facilitating Soviet espionage were negligible.

However, whilst concern in intellectual communism ebbed, worries about the influence of communists within British industry steadily grew more pronounced over the late '50s. Despite IRD's proven effectiveness as a generator and distributor of counter-propaganda, nevertheless the organisation struggled with limited short-term impact – particularly within those unions which were lacking in strong anti-communist leadership. Although matters were somewhat improved by the utilisation of private groups such as Industrial Research and Information Services Ltd the government still struggled to reverse communist gains in the short term as political apathy amongst the union rank and file allowed organised communist groups to install their members in a variety of leadership positions within industry. In the long term however, the government's campaign of counter-propaganda against communist trade union members succeeded in generating a hostile media climate which steadily made communist gains more difficult to achieve and sustain. In the face of intense scrutiny by Britain's national press – whose attention had

been caught primarily as a result of the dissemination of IRD material – communists found it considerably harder to exploit electoral technicalities (and indeed perpetrate outright fraud). The case of the Electrical Trades Union in particular significantly damaged communism's standing within the wider trade union movement – demonstrating that counter-propaganda campaigns if properly directed and sustained could eventually erode communist influence.

Meanwhile, officialdom struggled to adapt to changing technology and political realities. Though heartened by the fragmentation of the radical left in the late 1950s, the rise of the influential New Left and its ties to the burgeoning unilateral nuclear disarmament movement increasingly gave the government cause for concern. Further to this, the growth of public access to visual media in the form of television broadcasts and foreign film also gave officials pause – despite all evidence being to the contrary, senior politicians and civil servants continued to worry that communist propaganda could undermine the stability of Britain's parliamentary democracy. British counter-subversion policy therefore entered the 1960s at something of a crossroads. Gone were the old concerns over communists within the civil service and academia, which had largely defined policy since 1947. In their place came steady unease over communist influence in industry and a growing discomfort that old assumptions regarding counter-subversion were rapidly being rendered obsolete in the face of advancing technology and a radically altered political landscape. By the time of Macmillan's re-election in the autumn of 1959 though domestic communism appeared to be a diminishing threat, Whitehall did not yet consider the matter to be wholly resolved.



### **Loose Ends: November 1959- October 1964**

As the Macmillan government was returned to office following the October 1959 general election, official appraisals regarding the strength of domestic communism were characterised by a sense of cautious optimism. With the CPGB still reeling from the aftereffects of Hungary and the Party's disastrous 25<sup>th</sup> Congress, and the ongoing electoral fraud scandal within the Electrical Trades Union causing significant damage to wider communist credibility within the trade unions, it seemed plausible for ministers to begin to suppose that the domestic communist threat was firmly on the decline.

Meanwhile, the steady growth in popularity and influence of the unilateral nuclear disarmament movement provided strong evidence that communism no longer constituted the sole domestic threat to British security interests. For the first time since 1947, serious attention began to be turned to the reduction of domestic anti-communist measures as well as the diversification of counter-subversion policy more broadly. This sea change over the course of the early '60s – from communism being regarded as the central domestic subversive threat to merely one amongst many – was not a straightforward one however. In particular, communist infiltration into the lower ranks of the CND gave rise to fears that the nuclear-disarmament movement could become merely another mechanism for the advance of Soviet interests. Meanwhile the growth of interior dissent within the Labour Party, following a decade in the political wilderness, once more gave credence to old concerns – both within the PLP and without – that communist entryism was on the verge of co-opting Labour into a vehicle for the covert advancement of radical leftist politics.

Communist activities continued to be monitored intently by all the usual wings of the British government. Indeed, in many respects the period between 1960 and 1964 was marked by greater introspection regarding counter-subversion policy than at any point since 1951 and the substantial strengthening of Attlee's 1947 reforms. As the reduction of counter-communist measure began to be discussed in earnest, serious attention was turned across all branches of government as to the overall state of Britain's domestic counter-subversion strategy and whether the contemporaneous anti-communist stance continued to be justifiable in the face of the sweeping political turmoil which had affected the movement in the late 1950s. Further to this, the simultaneous outbreak of multiple, communist-related espionage scandals over 1961 and 1962, once again raised the profile

of official security arrangements and called into question many of the assumptions which had underpinned counter-subversive and counter-espionage efforts since the early 1950s. Counter-subversion policy in the latter years of conservative hegemony was therefore defined by three key traits. Firstly, a general cautious optimism on the part of ministers as well as governmental departments that the domestic communist problem may have been on the verge of resolving itself in a manner favourable to national security. Secondly, a renewed interest in the overall state of British communism, rather than its component parts, combined with critical introspection of counter-subversion policy to an extent unseen since the early '50s. Third and finally, a definitive move towards a more diversely targeted policy by 1964, characterised by a marginalisation of communism as a leading domestic security interest. By the end of the Attlee government communism had dominated domestic security concerns; by the election of Harold Wilson the threat had finally ebbed to the point of secondary importance.

### **Impact of the ETU trial**

The events of the late 1950s had left British communism in a state of disarray. The CPGB had lost somewhere between a quarter and a third of its membership, whilst meanwhile the ETU vote-rigging scandal finally seemed to be accomplishing what ministers had long puzzled over – securing the collapse of communist credibility within British industry. The case had already been damaging to communist interests within the unions due to consistent negative coverage in the national press since 1957.<sup>506</sup> Meanwhile, further fuel was added to the fire as a result of the re-election in 1959 of the ETU's communist general secretary Frank Haxell.<sup>507</sup> MI5's monitoring of CPGB headquarters confirmed that Haxell's re-election had also been the product of electoral fraud – though this information could be passed no further than the Ministry of Labour owing to the sensitivity of its collection.<sup>508</sup> Nevertheless, a media frenzy was once more whipped up around the case – to such an extent that the Foreign Office worried that 'there is a danger

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<sup>506</sup> Glyn Powell, 'Turning off the Power The Electrical Trades Union and the Anti-communist Crusade 1957-61', *Contemporary British History*, Vol. 18 Issue 2, 2004 pp. 7-9

<sup>507</sup> Despite the coverage, still only 17% of ETU membership actually voted in the election. Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> March 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>508</sup> Haxell's role as a central figure in CPGB industrial strategy was already known to MI5 as a result of its monitoring of CPGB HQ. Peter Kerrigan (the Party's industrial organiser) had stressed to the CPGB executive in 1954 that Haxell was key to retaining control of the ETU in the long run. MI5 surveillance report, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1954, TNA, KV 2/1846

that if carried to excess, this criticism might arouse such hostility in the trade union movement towards the Press that it would defeat its own object'<sup>509</sup> – and by May 1960, the General Council of the TUC had been forced to intervene. The ETU was presented with an ultimatum – either instigate legal proceedings to clear its name, or submit to a formal inquiry by the TUC into the allegations. The ETU chose the latter, only to have further argument arise between the two bodies following disagreement over who should conduct the inquiry – the TUC favouring a 'person of judicial authority and ability' while the ETU demanded that the position should go to a 'trade unionist of some integrity and standing'.<sup>510</sup>

Whilst the organisations bickered – adding still further negative press coverage – Les Cannon and Frank Chapple brought a civil suit against the ETU leadership in early 1961. With the plaintiff's barrister, Geoffrey Gardiner QC, claiming that the case represented the 'biggest fraud in the history of trade unionism'<sup>511</sup> over the course of a fortnight the government watched with glee as the ETU's communist executive was systematically discredited and exposed as fundamentally dishonest.<sup>512</sup> Though Haxell resigned his CPGB membership following the case and the Party did its best to distance itself from accusations of wrongdoing – the damage to communist credibility within the trade union movement was done. That CPGB involvement was a central feature of the case was made plain by the closing comments of the presiding judge, Mr Justice Winn, who found that 'not only was the ETU managed and controlled by Communists and pliant sympathisers, but it was so managed in the service of the Communist Party'.<sup>513</sup> As a direct consequence, the TUC demanded that Frank Foulkes (communist president of the ETU) immediately submit himself for re-election. When the request was refused, the TUC expelled the ETU, forcing a crisis within the union which resulted in the total dismissal of the ETU executive board, to be replaced by an entirely non-communist leadership following open

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<sup>509</sup> 'Communism in the Trade Unions', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 6<sup>th</sup> October 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> Gerald Gardiner QC, final speech for the plaintiffs, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1961, op cit. C.H Rolph, *All Those in Favour? An Account of the High Court Action Against the Electrical Trades Union and its Officers for Ballot-Rigging in the Election of Union Officials, as Prepared from the Official Court Transcript*, (Andre Deutsch, London, 1962), p. 215

<sup>512</sup> The evidence brought was damning – particularly proof of the extra 30'000 envelopes which had been commissioned by Haxell to sway the vote. For a full transcript of all evidence presented, see Rolph, *All Those in Favour*, pp. 22-102

<sup>513</sup> Judgement of Mr. Justice Winn, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1961, as cited in Rolph, *All Those in Favour?* p. 233

elections in 1962.<sup>514</sup> Importantly, the whole incident passed without a single mention of Whitehall interference at any stage – further adding to official satisfaction:

‘So far as concerned Electrical Trade Union matters, publicity had been very successful, and it was particularly gratifying that no Government Department had been mentioned by the Communist Press as having had a hand in their recent discomfitures. The whole issue must however be kept in front of public opinion.’<sup>515</sup>

The suit and subsequent judicial findings against the ETU executive board effectively broke communist power within the unions whilst granting Whitehall a hefty propaganda victory without the political cost which would have been borne had the full extent of government involvement come to public light. News of the loss of communist control over the ETU’s executive committee was carried as the first or second story in most of the national press, whilst favourable editorial comment was published in the *Times*, *Daily Express*, *Telegraph*, *Guardian* and *Daily Mail*.<sup>516</sup> The *Daily Worker* meanwhile rather carried a rather feeble editorial complaining that the result had been brought about by:

‘The monopoly press which has worked indefatigably for this result for the last 12 years... never in the history of the whole trade union movement has a group in opposition to an executive received such unanimous support... (the anti-communist campaign has been conducted by) the Right Wing, aided by the Tory Press, its trade union organisations, IRIS, the Economic League and influential Labour Party and trade union leaders.’<sup>517</sup>

Notably, the *Worker* carried no mention of the involvement of any official department or government minister. Both industrial communism and the CPGB had been exposed on the public stage as fundamentally untrustworthy – more interested in securing positions of power than representing the interests of British workers – in a manner which to the public seemed natural and entirely devoid of official meddling. Though weak protestations of the whole affair being a crude government stitch-up would continue well into the early noughties to little avail,<sup>518</sup> the effect on the mainstream trade union movement was such that earlier apathy began to be replaced with a general wariness and distrust of communist

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<sup>514</sup> John Lloyd, *Light & Liberty: A History of the EETPU*, (Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1990), pp. 466-467

<sup>515</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 4<sup>th</sup> December 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>516</sup> ‘Communism in Britain: Counter-Measures, May-October 1961’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 21<sup>st</sup> November 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>517</sup> *Daily Worker*, 4<sup>th</sup> August 1961, as included in IRD briefing for August 1961, 11<sup>th</sup> September 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>518</sup> For example, see the Graham Stevenson, *The ETU: Light or Liberty Half a Century on: The 1961 Ballot-Rigging Case Reconsidered*, (Self-published, Birmingham, 2010) a tortuously convoluted piece by the current District Secretary for the Greater Midlands Region of the Communist Party of Britain (a separate entity to the CPGB, founded in the late 1980s) arguing that communists in the ETU were the blameless victims of a mass government conspiracy. Accessed via: [http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=1520&Itemid=136](http://www.grahamstevenson.me.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1520&Itemid=136)

motives. As the Security Service assessment of the case's aftermath rather jubilantly put it:

'The Party has been hit at the point where its strength and capacity for mischief was greatest – in the key trade union of a key industry. Its whole industrial apparatus has suffered as a consequence... The CPGB leaders are in no doubt about the implications of the defeat and intend to take disciplinary action against certain Communists on the ETU executive in a belated attempt to remove the stain of fraud from the Party's image.'<sup>519</sup>

The ETU case effectively halted the spread of communist influence in the trade unions, as the movement could no longer rely upon an apathetic union electorate in its pursuit of influence within British industry. Though the Communist Party continued to attempt to exploit British trade unionism for some time to come (indeed, the centre of the Party's strength remained the union movement through the late 1960s)<sup>520</sup> and indeed continued to maintain an influence 'greatly disproportionate to its size and influence in the country as a whole' its future attempts to infiltrate and control the executive committees of influential unions would never again prove as successful as they had in the late 1950s.

Quantitative analysis of strike action over the previous decade, bears out that communist gains amongst trade union leadership produced little by way of notably adverse effects on industrial relations. Whilst the immediate post-war period had constituted an all-time low for the occurrence of strike action – with the number of disputes per year weighing in at around 3.3 million days lost – the years since 1955 saw only a minor increase in industrial dispute.<sup>521</sup> 1955 to 1964 saw a rise in the total numbers of strikes to consistently above 2000 individual (mainly low-level) strikes recorded per year – peaking in 1957 (2859) and 1960 (2832) to bring the average to 3.6 million days lost per year by the mid '60s.<sup>522</sup> To place these figures in context, only 1 in 2000 working days was lost to industrial action over the period from 1951-1960 - a markedly lower rate than either the US, Belgium, Canada, Italy, Australia or France experienced over the same timeframe;<sup>523</sup> and considerably less than would be experienced by the country in the worst years of late 20<sup>th</sup> Century British industrial agitation in 1979 (the winter of discontent resulted in 29.5

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<sup>519</sup> 'Communism in the United Kingdom, April-November, 1961', Memorandum by the Security Service, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>520</sup> 'Subversion in the United Kingdom – August 1967', Paper by the Security Service, November 1967, TNA, PREM, 13/1801

<sup>521</sup> Alan Campbell, Nina Fishman & John McIlroy, 'The Post-War Compromise: Mapping Industrial Politics, 1945-64, *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics: The Post-War Compromise, 1945-64*, (Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 1999), p. 98

<sup>522</sup> David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain, 1957-1962*, (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), pp. 512-514

<sup>523</sup> Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, p. 513

million days lost that year)<sup>524</sup> and 1984 (the effects of the miners' strike produced something in the region of 27.1 million days lost).<sup>525</sup> Such a period of relative calm in industrial relations helps to explain Whitehall's more positive outlook with regards to communist subversion at the beginning of the decade. Indeed, to policy-makers examining British communism's capabilities and intent over the period of 1960 and early 1961, it seemed as if '50s predictions that communist infiltration into union leadership would inexorably lead to a marked worsening of industrial relations had been proven false. The deep blow dealt to trade union communism as a result of the ETU scandal combined with 50s predictions failure to materialise gave the government good reason to reassess communism's industrial influence.

### **Counter-Propaganda in the early 1960s**

It is worth noting here just how sophisticated official counter-propaganda efforts had become by the early 1960s. Though still run by a small three-man office under the auspices of the Foreign Office,<sup>526</sup> the English Section of the Information Research Department had, since its founding in 1951, acquired reach and influence which far outweighed its size. By 1962, the Section's monthly summary of communist related activities (compiled from overt sources) had achieved a circulation of 163 copies per month – a substantial proportion of which served to inform the holders of senior positions in wider government departments.<sup>527</sup> In particular, by the early '60s the Section was in regular liaison with the Ministries of Labour and Education as well as the Home Office – giving it significant clout over how communism was understood and perceived across the government.<sup>528</sup> Meanwhile, the Section's 'unattributable' papers had reached a circulation of figure of some 300 recipients by 1960 – both at home and abroad.<sup>529</sup> IRD's success in circulating anti-communist material had attracted attention from several Commonwealth governments – most notably the Australian – who subsequently sought to utilise the

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<sup>524</sup> Office of National Statistics, data accessible via: <http://visual.ons.gov.uk/the-history-of-strikes-in-britain/>

<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of Information Research Department', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> April 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>527</sup> 'Communism in Britain: Counter Measures, November 1961 – November 1962', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>528</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of Information Research Department', Report by the FO to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> April 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>529</sup> Ibid.

Department's experience in formulating their own counter-subversive policies.<sup>530</sup>

Meanwhile on the domestic front, the English Section played a consulting role (on a strictly unofficial basis) to numerous opinion-forming bodies across various spheres of British public life. By 1961 not only did it, predictably, advise the research departments of both the Conservative and Labour Parties, but also the Church of England Council on Inter-Church Relations, the Quakers, the British Legion, National Union of Students, National Union of Teachers, the Boy Scouts and – somewhat improbably – the Lawn Tennis Association.<sup>531</sup> Meanwhile however, though the Section maintained links across a wide variety of groups, the vast majority of its attention during the '60s continued to be focused upon communism within the trade union movement. Again, the official approach in this area remained relatively unchanged and relied upon utilisation of private third-party actors for the dissemination of counter-propaganda material. In particular, IRIS remained the most utilised non-governmental group. Despite leadership difficulties over 1958/59 (a protracted squabble amongst the group's executive board during this period had nearly resulted in the company's dissolution)<sup>532</sup>, by 1960 the company had returned to a functioning state and was once more filling the role of chief outlet for IRD counter-propaganda. Its advantages over rival groups were significant, as stated by the Foreign Office:

'There was general agreement that Industrial Research and Information Services (IRIS) was the most useful of the anti-Communist organisations, at least from the point of view of the Government. The others were either more or less overtly Conservative Party organisations, such as the Economic League, Common Cause and Aims of Industry, or religious institutions such as the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the Industrial Welfare Association and Moral Rearmament. IRIS could usefully expand its activities, especially at the local level.'<sup>533</sup>

The perceived usefulness of IRIS to the government – due to both influence within trade unionism as well as plausible deniability – was proven by Whitehall's willingness to bankroll the company to ensure its ability to expand. Indeed, the AC (H) was willing to offer up to £6000 per annum to the company (roughly equivalent to £50'000 in 2016) such was the belief in its utility to wider counter-communist policy.<sup>534</sup> This being said,

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<sup>530</sup> At the request of the Australian Liberal Party, see 'Communism in Britain: Counter Measures, November 1961 – November 1962', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1346. Notable as prior to 1955 the Australian government had been leery of close co-operation with IRD, see Philip Deery, 'Covert Propaganda and the Cold War: Britain and Australia, 1948-1955, *The Round Table*, Vol. 90, Issue 361, 2001

<sup>531</sup> List of unofficial contacts, 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of Information Research Department', Report by the FO to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> April 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>532</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1959, TNA, CAB 134/1344

<sup>533</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 18<sup>th</sup> December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1347

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

IRIS's revered position was also almost certainly heavily influenced by the pedigree of its trustees and their closeness to the Conservative government. Sir Hartley Shawcross actively lobbied Harold Macmillan to invest more official funds via the Secret Vote,<sup>535</sup> whilst by 1964 the board of trustees also included Viscount Chandos, Lord Southborough (the 2<sup>nd</sup>), Sir Patrick Hennessy and Sir Christopher Steel.<sup>536</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such nepotistic undertones, faith in the organisation was well placed insofar as it was effective in its intended role. IRIS allowed the government to effectively channel information into union politics in such a way as aroused neither undue suspicion and typically produced outcomes favourable to official policy. Meanwhile, the fact that official cooperation with the company continued well into the 1960s demonstrates that such utility was not merely temporary. For illustration of this, the case of elections held by the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) in early 1962 provides an excellent example. In the run-up to the elections (which held relevance for the government due to the USDAW's status as fifth largest union at the time),<sup>537</sup> through its routine monitoring of known British communists, the Security Service learned of the news that the communist backed candidate for the post of general secretary had been in recent contact with the World Federation of Trade Unions (the Soviet backed international trade organisation from which the Trades Union Congress had split in 1949 – along with most other Western national level trade union groups – as a result of disagreements over the Marshall Plan. Recognised as a communist front, membership of the WFTU was proscribed by the Labour Party).<sup>538</sup> This information was duly passed to IRD's English Section, who in turn were able to pass a 'sanitised' version (omitting of course key details regarding the exact provenance of the information) to IRIS who then communicated the intelligence to anti-communist elements within the union, whilst simultaneously publishing the allegations in a generally released newsletter circulated immediately before the election – as a result 'a resounding majority for the non-Communist candidate was recorded.'<sup>539</sup> The whole system worked as an effective

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<sup>535</sup> 'Note for the Record' describing meeting between Sir Hartley Shawcross and Harold Macmillan, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 1962, TNA, PREM 11/4684

<sup>536</sup> Letter from Sir Hartley Shawcross to Alec Douglas-Home, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1964, TNA, PREM 11/4684

<sup>537</sup> 'Communism in Britain: Counter Measures, November 1961 – November 1962', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1348

<sup>538</sup> List of proscribed organisations, Papers of the General Secretary of the Labour Party NEC 1945-64, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, Labour Party Archives, LP/GS/PROS

<sup>539</sup> 'Communism in Britain: Counter Measures, November 1961 – November 1962', Note by the FO to the AC (H), 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1348



pipeline for intelligence, so that information uncovered by the Security Service via covert means could be effectively exploited to its maximum potential whilst ensuring that the sensitivity of the Service's sources was not compromised and nor was the general public made aware of the scale and pervasiveness of the monitoring. Indirect interference in union elections was not a one-off affair. Similar interventions were made in a number of unions over the same period – including the Transport and General Workers Union, National Union of Mineworkers and Amalgamated Society of Painters and Decorators.<sup>540</sup> The system worked well and went a considerable way towards solving earlier problems which had troubled ministers under the Attlee and Churchill governments – namely the political impracticality of direct intervention in union affairs as well as official unease in tampering directly with the democratic process. By channelling intelligence through propaganda streams, Whitehall was able to both mitigate communist influence – communists could no longer rely upon disorganised electoral opposition – whilst reassuring ministers that the government's hands were, in some sense, still clean.<sup>541</sup>

It is curious to note however that IRIS continued to be such an effective outlet for official counter-propaganda for such a lengthy period of time. Since the company's founding in 1957, it had been subject to repeated attack within the communist press – particularly the *Daily Worker* – and did possess a reputation as a news source with heavy anti-communist bias. By 1962, the CPGB was attacking it directly:

‘An indirect tribute to the effectiveness of anti-Communist propaganda in Britain was voiced by Mr Peter Kerrigan, the Party's national industrial organised, in a speech at a Communist conference in Prague. His catalogue of anti-Communist organisations included the Labour Party, the Trades Union Congress, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, IRIS, Common Cause, the Economic League and the British Press – but not Government Department was held responsible.’<sup>542</sup>

Though the tone here is understandably self-congratulatory – undoubtedly it was one of the government's most significant successes in its prosecution of anti-communist policy that IRD's and the Security Service's links to organisations such as IRIS never became publically known – it is interesting to note that official counter-subversion efforts do not appear to have been unduly hampered as a result of IRIS' (and similar groups') public

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<sup>540</sup> Not to mention the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, National Union of Railwaymen, Amalgamated Engineering Union, etc. ‘Communist Industrial Activity 1961-1962’, Paper by the Security Service, December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1348

<sup>541</sup> ‘Communist Industrial Activity 1961-1962’, Paper by the Security Service, December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1348

<sup>542</sup> ‘Communism in Britain: Counter Measures, November 1961 – November 1962’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 30<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1348

reputation as fundamentally anti-communist in outlook. Despite the fact that it was expected that IRIS would produce anti-communist material, this does not appear to have damaged its reputation more broadly – the communist movement itself was of course overwhelmingly hostile however the ‘middle ground’ of British trade unionism, those groups that ministers had despaired of as ‘overwhelmingly apathetic to communist gains’ appear to have regarded IRIS as a trustworthy and reliable source of information. The company’s obvious lack of impartiality did not hinder its effectiveness as a vehicle for the transmission of officially sourced, anti-communist counter-propaganda. Whitehall’s co-option of private groups gave its counter-propaganda efforts an efficacy which had been previously lacking – particularly during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

### **Continued Necessity of a Robust Counter-Subversive Policy**

As such, with counter-propaganda efforts going well, British communism seemingly almost wholly politically irrelevant, and the CPGB’s industrial influence markedly diminished, attention began to be turned in late 1960 as to whether governmental counter-subversive and anti-communist measures were still warranted in light of what appeared to be an improved situation. As recorded at the AC (H)’s meeting for the 24<sup>th</sup> October 1960:

‘MR. MURRAY [IRD representative to the Committee] invited the Committee to consider the stage their work had now reached; as was reflected by the four papers prepared by the Foreign Office for the Agenda, a somewhat static situation now obtained as a result of their previous studies having been prosecuted to the fullest extent possible in present circumstances. He suggested, therefore, the time was opportune for bringing together all aspects of Communism in Britain in a comprehensive paper which might point to other areas worthy of attention and treatment.’<sup>543</sup>

As Murray had stated, albeit in a slightly round-about fashion, those papers presented at both meetings of the AC (H) in 1960 had all indicated the satisfactory resolution of the various problems related to the British communist movement which Whitehall had recently been monitoring. It had been found that ‘there was good evidence that the Communist Party were seriously worried by the adverse publicity which had been given to their malpractices in the Electrical Trades Union’, whilst the Seventh Communist World Youth Festival held in Vienna in 1959 had passed without incident (remembering that the 5<sup>th</sup> Festival had been a public relations disaster as a result of clashes between British students and US troops stationed in Austria – the 6<sup>th</sup> Festival in 1957 had been

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<sup>543</sup> Comments by F.R.H Murray regarding the future work of the AC (H), 24<sup>th</sup> October 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

largely boycotted by Western communists over Hungary)<sup>544</sup>, largely as a result of the indifference shown to it by its Austrian hosts:

‘There was evidence that the Communists were disappointed with the degree of success they had obtained; they had clearly hoped that attendance as a whole, and, consequently, the number of those who were favourably impressed would have been greater than they actually were. The attitude of the Austrians was undoubtedly one of the main reasons why this Festival’s impact had not been as great as its promoters [sic] had hoped.’<sup>545</sup>

Amongst the other reports mentioned meanwhile was the MI5 investigation into communism in the BFI (previously discussed in the last chapter), whose results had ‘fully satisfied the Foreign Office, who had originally raised this matter’<sup>546</sup> as well as a brief paper concerning ‘The Communist Party of Great Britain and its Attitude Towards Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament’ which had concluded that ‘at present the general attitude of the leaders of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament was disdainful towards the CPGB, whatever the difficulties might be in maintaining this attitude in the months ahead’.<sup>547</sup> With many of the major issues which had preoccupied counter-subversive policy seemingly in hand, the time appeared right for a comprehensive analysis of the British communist movement which would incorporate all aspects of the phenomena and provide ministers with a complete picture of British communism’s intent and capabilities for the first time since essentially 1951.<sup>548</sup> The Security Service were tasked with producing such a paper and duly delivered the circa 110 page document, based upon ‘material drawn from every type of source, some of great secrecy and of great and continuing national value’<sup>549</sup>, to the Committee for their first meeting of 1961 at the beginning of May. Demonstrating that communism still continued to attract attention from the very highest levels of government, beyond the AC (H) the paper was also circulated to the Lord Privy Seal, Ministers of Labour and Defence, Foreign Secretary, Home Secretary as well as the Prime Minister himself.<sup>550</sup> Contrary to what might have

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<sup>544</sup> ‘Sixth World Youth Festival’, Note by the FO circulated to the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> January 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1343

<sup>545</sup> ‘The Seventh World Youth Festival’, minutes of meeting of the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> October 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>546</sup> Comments of D.C. Hopson (FO) to meeting of the AC (H), 14<sup>th</sup> October 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>547</sup> ‘The Communist Party of Great Britain and Its Attitude towards Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament’, Note by the FO circulated to the AC (H), October 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>548</sup> 1951 saw a range of studies produced on communist activity across British society, as well as primers on communist theory and the relation of Soviet foreign policy to domestic communism. Since that point however the approach had been more piecemeal. See TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>549</sup> ‘Communism and Countermeasures in the United Kingdom’, Note by the Security Service to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>550</sup> Minutes of meeting of the AC(H), 8<sup>th</sup> May 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

been expected – given all evidence which had been produced up until this point – the Service’s conclusions were deeply troubled. As stated:

‘Our broad conclusion is that during the last year the Communist threat has become more serious than at any time since the death of Stalin. It would be wrong to assess the CPGB’s chances of success at its own evaluation of them, but account must be taken of the opportunities presented to it by the present situation on the Left which are broader in scope than at any time since 1945. By exploiting its position in the trade unions, the Party hopes to exacerbate differences in the Labour Movement as to split it wide open and thereby facilitate its direct entry into the political arena. Even granted that the Party may exaggerate its abilities and the scope of its opportunities, the desirability of commensurate counter-measures is nevertheless clear enough. Normally in Britain public opinion can be relied upon to produce its own corrective to this sort of situation. In this case however, it is doubtful whether even informed public opinion is fully aware of what is happening, and it is in the sphere of publicity... that most needs to be done.’<sup>551</sup>

Had MI5 not typically acted as the voice of moderation and caution within Whitehall since the first introduction of active counter-subversion measures in 1947, it would be easy to dismiss such a conclusion as reactionary nonsense brought on by bureaucratic inertia. Given however that the Security Service had typically advocated for moderation in anti-communist measures, and given the fact that (as previously discussed) the Security Service had by this point built up a comprehensive, relatively complete and well understood picture of British communism, the fears expressed are worthy of deeper analysis.

Much of the Service’s angst can be traced back to the relative weakness of the Labour Party in 1961, which was still struggling to come to terms with the political blow it had been dealt at the 1959 General Election. Despite widespread popular discontent with Conservative governance following 1956’s Suez crisis,<sup>552</sup> by 1959 an improved economy had granted Macmillan the political capital needed to be able to increase the overall Tory majority by 20 seats – to a total of 107 seats overall - over his Labour rivals, the third such consecutive increase in as many elections.<sup>553</sup> The scale of the defeat significantly damaged Labour Party membership’s faith in its leadership – as well as the leadership’s faith in itself – opening a schism within the Party regarding its political direction, as well as granting communists their first chance at legitimisation via the vehicle of Labour since the CPGB’s last attempt at affiliation in 1946. As stated within MI5’s report:

‘1959 was also to provide the Party with opportunities for a more direct intervention in Labour Party affairs. The inquest held by the Labour Party on the results of the 1959 General Election brought the Clause 4 issue

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<sup>551</sup> Conclusion to Security Service report ‘Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures’, March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 15

<sup>552</sup> D.R. Thorpe, *Supremacy: The Life of Harold Macmillan*, (Chatto & Windus, London, 2010), pp. 362-363

<sup>553</sup> David Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, (Bloomsbury, London, 2015), pp. 415-416

into prominence and the Communist leadership sensed a split in the Labour movement... By mid-summer of 1960 the Party was convinced that it had in its grasp a real opportunity to assume the classic Communist role of vanguard of the proletariat, or at least of the large section of the left which is unilateralist. This opportunity came largely from its penetration of the trade unions, and in particular of the National Committee of the AEU, which enabled the Party, at a time of serious dissension in the Labour Party, to influence policy at the annual TUC and Labour Party conferences on both the issue of Clause 4 and of unilateralism... 1959 and 1960 thus saw a radical change in the opportunities open to the CPGB... In moments of exaggerated self-confidence, it even sees the possibility of dismantling both the British nuclear deterrent and the right wing leadership of the Labour Party.<sup>554</sup>

The situation was demonstrative of two facts – firstly just how continuously important the Labour Party was to wider cross-party anti-communist policy. In its role as the political representative of the moderate left, the existence of the Labour Party had provided a viable outlet for the British left to compete for and exercise power within the system of parliamentary democracy. Moreover, its refusal to grant affiliation to the CPGB had denied the British communist movement the political legitimacy it so craved and ensured that its popularity was constrained to a relatively small minority of the British population.<sup>555</sup> Loss of belief by the Labour Party in trans-atlanticism coupled with a growing unilateralist sentiment amongst the Party's rank and file held the potential to open the door to communist affiliation and theoretically grant the movement greater political influence than it had ever previously enjoyed. Secondly, that communist determination to exploit dissension within Labour ranks at the cost of all other matters demonstrated that British communism was ultimately far more interested in the acquisition of political legitimacy than it was in fifth-column-esque covert espionage and subversion. The extent of the CPGB's determination to exploit Labour's crisis was stated openly in its Political Resolution for the 27<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, held in London in 1961:

'The present developments in the Labour Party are the vindication of the outlook of the Communist Party... Now a point has been reached when the progressive forces of trade unionism, alongside the fighters for socialism in the Constituency Parties, have made possible the reversal of the old automatic right-wing majority and the winning of left-wing majorities... The strengthening and increased political consciousness of the progressive alliance engaged in this struggle, can and must lead to the final elimination of right-wing capitalist influence in the Labour Party, and the victory of a united Labour movement in which the Communist Party as the political class party of the working-class struggle for power and socialism will fulfil its role in comradeship and partnership with all the advancing sections of the organised working class.'<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>554</sup> 'The Problem', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 7

<sup>555</sup> One of the CPGB's first actions following its founding in 1920 had been to attempt affiliation with the Labour Party. Max Beer, *A History of British Socialism Vol. II*, (Psychology Press, London, 2001), p. 418 Further formal attempts were made in 1921, 1922, 1924, 1935, 1943 and 1946, Harry Harmer, *The Longman Companion to the Labour Party, 1900-1998*, (Routledge, London, 2014), pp. 165-168

<sup>556</sup> Political Resolution of the 27<sup>th</sup> CPGB Congress, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1961, Communist Party of Great Britain Archives, CP/CENT/CONG/13/01

The CPGB were determined to advance the cause of British communism via the vehicle of the Labour Party, even at the expense of Moscow-approved doctrine. The Party's position on unilateralism in particular saw a total reversal – from staunchly against to openly advocacy – in early 1959 as CPGB leadership began to recognise that the burgeoning nuclear disarmament movement offered a pathway back from the electoral irrelevancy which had befallen the Party since its rout at the 1950 General Election.<sup>557</sup> Disagreements within the Labour Party on nuclear policy as well as the continued relevance of Clause 4 of the 1918 Labour constitution (which laid out the Party's commitment to nationalisation of industry and 'common ownership of the means of production')<sup>558</sup> seemed to the CPGB to offer an opportunity to find common ground with the pacifist, unilateralist and anti-American elements on the left of the Labour Party.<sup>559</sup> Theoretically, potential existed for the CPGB to instigate the creation of a hard-left voting bloc at the Party conference which could challenge Labour leadership and facilitate the entry of the CPGB into the Labour Party.<sup>560</sup> In particular, the success of the inaugural CND organised Aldermaston march in April 1959 helped to convince CPGB leadership of the wisdom of adopting a unilateralist line – in direct contrast to the Soviet Union's multilateralist policy.<sup>561</sup> The march, which consisted of a 52 mile procession between the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment located at Aldermaston in Berkshire and London's Trafalgar Square, had attracted some 15'000 participants in its 1959 incarnation – demonstrating that CND had a relatively broad base of popular support which cut across traditional political divisions.<sup>562</sup> Though the leadership of CND was not explicitly communist,<sup>563</sup> the group's demonstrated ability to garner mass support rendered it a target for communist penetration. As such, immediately following the 1959 march the CPGB suddenly switched policy from one of opposition to CND to support and penetration – targeting local level CND committees and the 'ground-level' infrastructure of the

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<sup>557</sup> Evan Smith & Matthew Worley, *Against the Grain: The British Far Left from 1956*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2014), p. 48

<sup>558</sup> Kynaston, *Modernity Britain*, pp. 416-417

<sup>559</sup> 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Countermeasures', Memorandum by the FO and Security Service, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

<sup>561</sup> A particularly sharp change, given that the CPGB had used this exact same tactic to previously defeat unilateralist motions at the 1956, '57 & '58 TUC & Labour Party conventions. 'The Communist Party of Great Britain and Its Attitude towards Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament', Note by the FO to the AC (H), October 14<sup>th</sup> 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1345

<sup>562</sup> Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb: A History of the World Nuclear Disarmament Movement, 1954-1970*, (Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, 1997), p. 185

<sup>563</sup> Ibid, pp. 192-193

group.<sup>564</sup> Though this tactic produced only limited direct success for the CPGB – CND leadership remained devoid of communist representation – this switch in support did have the knock-on effect of bolstering the political clout of the anti-nuclear movement within both the trade union establishment and also the Labour Party itself (by proxy via the CPGB’s lingering influence on certain unions).<sup>565</sup> During the mid-summer of 1960, unilateralist resolutions were passed at both the annual TUC and Labour Party conferences due to the direct support of communist-backed voting blocs.<sup>566</sup> For the first time in decades the CPGB appeared to have the potential to represent the vanguard of the British left.

Beyond the Security Service and Conservative government, the CPGB’s foray into unilateralism and renewed assault on Labour, also worried many within the upper echelons of the Labour Party itself. Indeed, as has been previously argued by Andrew, the early 1960s marked the period in which Labour leadership was more worried about communist subversion within their own party than at any point since the expulsion of the ‘Lost Sheep’ MPs in the latter 1940s.<sup>567</sup> By 1961, Hugh Gaitskell – in agreement with Deputy Leader George Brown and Shadow Home Secretary Patrick Gordon Walker – had become sufficiently concerned about the issue to directly seek help from the Security Service in identifying communists within his party.<sup>568</sup> With a decade out of power having left Labour hopelessly out of the loop of government security, the MPs were forced to first approach the sensationalist journalist Chapman Pincher for instructions on how to contact the Service (Gaitskell was loathe to go through official ministerial channels for fear of gifting electoral ammunition to his Conservative rivals).<sup>569</sup> Following a letter to Roger Hollis from Gordon Walker, a meeting was arranged between the Shadow Home Secretary and Graham Mitchell (then Deputy Director General) for the 5<sup>th</sup> September. With Gordon Walker furnishing a list of sixteen Labour MPs whom were believed to be secret Communist Party members, Mitchell recorded the meetings as follows:

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<sup>564</sup> ‘Communism in the United Kingdom’, Note by the FO to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> April 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>565</sup> The ETU in particular, also the AEU.

<sup>566</sup> Lewis Minkin, *The Labour Party Conference: A Study in the Politics of Intra-Party Democracy*, (Allen Lane, London, 1978), p. 112

<sup>567</sup> Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), pp. 412-415,

<sup>568</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 412

<sup>569</sup> A decision Brown & Walker would later come to regret. Pincher, perhaps inevitably, published the full details of their meeting in the *Daily Express* 7 years later. Gaitskell was, of course, past caring. Chapman Pincher, ‘A Communist Spy in the Labour Machine’, *Daily Express*, 28<sup>th</sup> June 1968

‘The Labour leaders were aware that there were quite a lot of Communists within their ranks in the House but they had in mind to expel only about 6 or 8. When it came to taking this action they would take it openly, expelling the Members as being Communists. They hoped that if they made these examples “the others would be very careful”... Gordon Walker may have gathered from my expression that his project was not meeting with much enthusiasm. He said that Labour leaders were very ready for us to say “no” and indeed half expected it. They would fully understand if the DG found that he could not comply with their request [for information regarding communist penetration of the Parliamentary Labour Party]. In that event Gordon Walker would volunteer a one-way traffic, through safe channels, from him in person to any member of the Security Service whom we cared to nominate.’<sup>570</sup>

Overtly, this offer was too rejected – Mitchell stating that ‘it was incumbent on the Security Service to be very careful to do nothing which could be represented as partaking of a party political nature’.<sup>571</sup> The Service did however quietly investigate ten names on Walker’s list without informing PLP leadership.<sup>572</sup> Ironically, the name at the top of the list - Will Owen, Labour MP for Morpeth – was at the time dismissed by the Service as being of little interest. It was only following investigation nine years later that it was discovered that Owen was an agent of Czechoslovakian intelligence.<sup>573</sup> The implied distrust here perhaps a consequence of Labour’s decade out of power – whereas, as previously discussed, the Service had had a very close working relationship with the Party during the Attlee years (Attlee remained on the circulation list for IRD’s information briefings up until his retirement from Party leadership in November 1955)<sup>574</sup> – the Service by 1961 had no direct line of contact with the PLP. Meanwhile, George Brown’s reputation for regular bouts of being ‘tired and emotional’ seems unlikely to have inspired Service confidence in Labour leadership.<sup>575</sup> MI5 therefore had no trusted contacts within the Party as it had done during the Attlee government. Though the Security Service was happy to indirectly provide information to the Labour Party in the form of the ‘unattributable paper’ series circulated by IRD’s English Section,<sup>576</sup> the close working

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<sup>570</sup> Note by Graham Mitchell recalling meeting with Gordon Walker, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1961, op cit. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 413

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.

<sup>572</sup> See Appendix

<sup>573</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 413. Owen was joined in this endeavour by Conservative MP Ray Mawby, who provided Czech intelligence with political gossip & a hand drawn map of the PM’s office in the House of Commons. Unlike Owen, there is no indication that the Security Service were aware of Mawby’s activities. See Gordon Corera’s BBC report ‘Tory MP Raymond Mawby sold information to Czech spies’, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2012, accessed via: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-18617168>

<sup>574</sup> ‘Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the IRD of the FO’, Memorandum by the FO, 15<sup>th</sup> March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/740. Though explicit mention is not made after this report, it seems reasonable to presume that Gaitskell was kept similarly informed.

<sup>575</sup> Brown’s drinking was notorious throughout both the government and press. See *Private Eye*, Issue. 232, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1970 for the origins of the phrase ‘tired and emotional’.

<sup>576</sup> ‘Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of Information Research Department’, Report by the FO to the AC (H), 27<sup>th</sup> April 1960, TNA, CAB 134/1346



relationship which had defined the Attlee years had almost entirely vanished by the latter years of Conservative hegemony.

Therefore, for a brief time the CPGB regained its status as a credible threat to Britain's established political order. Concerns proved to be short-lived however, with the perceived threat diminishing markedly by late 1961 as once again CPGB mismanagement (as opposed to direct governmental counter-subversion measures) undermined the movement's long-term designs. Much of MI5's concern had been predicated on the worry that communist infiltration of the CND would lead to the steady growth of an anti-leadership voting bloc within the Labour Party – which in turn could then be used to cement the PLP's committal to unilateralism and given time unseat Labour leadership in favour of candidates more in line with communist mores.<sup>577</sup> The outcome of Labour's 1961 conference held at Blackpool in November demonstrated that such concerns were ultimately invalid as the CPGB's ability to affect the wider British left quickly dissipated over the months leading up to the conference. In particular, failure by the communist wing within the Amalgamated Engineering Union to convince the wider leadership of the merits of unilateralism over preserving unity within the Labour movement lead to the reversal of that union's previously pro-unilateralist position at its annual conference in late April 1961 by a margin of twenty eight to twenty three.<sup>578</sup> Due to the AEU being an influential union in its own right, plus the fact that its conference occurred towards the beginning of the unionist conference 'season' the precedent was set for within trade unionism more widely to favour anti-unilateralist resolutions. Thus meaning that by the time of Labour's conference the general trend amongst the unions had comprehensively reversed to a position of anti-unilateralism. The CPGB was left in a still more awkward position by the increase in public attention given to the anti-nuclear Committee of 100 group, founded in 1960 by Bertrand Russell and the American peace activist Ralph Schoenman. As reported by MI5:

'To make things worse for the Communist Party, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which it had sedulously courted and penetrated, was outclassed in publicity and nuisance value by the Committee of 100,

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<sup>577</sup> Though the leadership challenger in 1961 was Harold Wilson, Wilson himself was not a supporter of unilateralism – or communism for that matter.

<sup>578</sup> 'Communist Industrial Activity', Paper by the Security Service, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1347, also 'Communism in the United Kingdom', Memorandum by the Security Service, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1961, TNA CAB 134/1346

in which it has little influence and which promptly picketed the Soviet Embassy when the Russians, to the CPGB's annoyance, resumed the testing of nuclear weapons.<sup>579</sup>

The two blocs, trade unionists and CND activists, the CPGB had banked upon to be able to pressure Labour into the formal adoption of a unilateralist stance – which would thereby undermine the authority of the current PLP leadership – had thus either switched back to anti-unilateralist positions, as in the unions, or had seen their influence whittled away by the rise of rival and more publically captivating groups by the time of the conference. As such the second leadership challenge in as many years at the 1961 Labour Party conference ended in a resounding victory for the PLP establishment – with Hugh Gaitskell garnering some 75% of the overall vote to Anthony Greenwood's 25% - thus ending any further talk of intra-party regicide (though the conference the following year would of course see another leadership contest following the unexpected death of Gaitskell in January 1963, an event which resulted in the accession of Harold Wilson to the leadership)<sup>580</sup> and demonstrating to both CPGB and Security Service alike that any possibility of British communism entering the fold of mainstream Labour was now almost impossibly distant.<sup>581</sup> The brief and unexpected window of political opportunity that British communism enjoyed between the summers of 1960 and 61 closed as suddenly as it had opened. Though the opportunities for exploitation of the Labour Party were never as great as hoped for by CPGB leadership – as was acknowledged within the MI5 report 'it would be wrong to assess the CPGB's chances of success at its own evaluation of them'<sup>582</sup> – the fact that for a moment significant communist gains within the mainstream left seemed at least theoretically plausible was enough to give the government pause and remind policy-makers that British communism was not yet a totally spent threat. Counter-subversive policy relied to large extent on the existence of a robust, moderate left – as the CPGB's marginal gains at the 1960 Labour Party conference served to demonstrate.

### **Limited Options**

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<sup>579</sup> 'Communism in the United Kingdom', Memorandum by the Security Service, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346

<sup>580</sup> Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson*, (HarperCollins, London, 1992), pp. 255-261

<sup>581</sup> There were no further attempts by the CPGB to affiliate with the Labour Party, Chronology of Labour Party/CPGB relations, *Longman Companion to the Labour Party*, ebook edition, accessed via: [http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/pearsonlabour/chronology\\_of\\_labour\\_and\\_communist/0?id=9794223](http://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/pearsonlabour/chronology_of_labour_and_communist/0?id=9794223)

<sup>582</sup> Conclusion to Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 15

Even brief resurgences of relative communist influence - such as the period between the 1960 and '61 Labour Party conferences - tended to produce intense worry on the part of the government for the simple reason that still, even some thirteen years after significant counter-subversive reform measures began to be introduced under Attlee the extent of available official counter-measures to communism remained remarkably limited. The continued status of the Communist Party as a legal political organisation necessarily limited the actions which could be taken against it, whilst the privileged legal and political position of the trade unions again made official counter-communist action there a complicated matter.<sup>583</sup> There was however little appetite to change this by the early '60s (although equally formal prohibition of the CPGB had never seriously been considered at any point previously either) and the general arrangement of political and legal considerations with regards to communism were by now regarded as essentially immutable by the British security state. As stated by MI5:

'Whether to go the whole way and ban a Communist Party or, as the Americans say, to "harass" it to the extent that it virtually becomes illegal, is essentially a political decision to be taken a government in the light of the traditions, constitution, security situation and public opinion of the country concerned. Mention has already been made of the fact that in a stable and prosperous democracy like the UK tolerance of the Communist Party produces in some degree a check to its more extreme activities in the short run. This is not, however, the basic reason why the CPGB is allowed to exist. Rather it is a consequence of British traditions. The United States is also a stable and prosperous democracy but it has taken measures against its Communist Party which have driven it underground. The pros and cons of taking such drastic action can be argued, but... it is realistic to assume that the present position will be maintained whereby the CPGB is allowed to function as a legal political party and that direct government action against Communists will not in normal times go beyond the 1948 policy of denying them employment in work the nature of which is vital to the security of the state.'<sup>584</sup>

With direct action essentially politically and legally impossible, government response continued to be limited to indirect measures and the exploitation of counter-propaganda. As has previously been discussed, such an approach had both advantages and drawbacks – clandestine, government-backed anti-communist propaganda had helped to inculcate a hostile attitude towards the communist movement with the national press as well as slowly wear away at the political apathy within the unions over the long term even if in the short term the government relied upon communist ineptitude more than proactive measures. The fact was that there were 'relatively few chinks in the Party's armour which

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<sup>583</sup> 'Counter-Measures', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, pp. 10-11

<sup>584</sup> Comments regarding counter-measures, Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 10

could be widened without changing the law'<sup>585</sup> – the government relied upon the strategy of encouraging an anti-communist climate within the wider British public and hoping that the exposure of communist malpractice would lead naturally to the eventual collapse of any popular goodwill or apathy that British communism may have hoped to exploit. This being said, continued governmental tolerance of the communist movement did have the unlikely side-effect of helping to ensure that it was actually in the CPGB's best interests to restrict itself to legitimate and open activities as much as possible. As the CPGB believed its best hope for fomenting a revolution of the proletariat was through the exploitation of pre-existing British political structures, it was in the paramount interest of the Party to maintain and preserve its constitutional status as a legal political party.<sup>586</sup> Ergo, the Security Service was able to comfort itself in the knowledge that the Party was:

'Not prepared to engage in espionage and has no espionage apparatus. It does not agree to card-holding Party members spying and it is indeed a blunder of the first magnitude for a Party member to be caught out as a spy.'<sup>587</sup>

This in itself was a marked change from the Party's pre-1945 behaviour. Elements of the CPGB had definitely dabbled in espionage both before and during the Second World War. Arguably, the most notable example of this was Douglas 'Dave' Springhall's passage of SOE information to the Soviet Union in 1943 whilst employed as the CPGB's national organiser.<sup>588</sup> As a result of the backlash against the case the Party had begun to insist that whilst it would not deny a communist – whether Party official or rank and file member – the right to take a personal decision and spy for the Soviet Union, such individuals should sever all connections with the Party and resign their membership before engaging in such activities. It was equally understood meanwhile that the Party had no sabotage apparatus, even if certain members of the Party did possess knowledge of explosives handling and could perhaps carry out sabotage on their own initiative.<sup>589</sup> These understandings meant that the official understanding of the communist threat had almost entirely shifted from initial estimates carried out in the 1940s following the Gouzenko revelations. Whereas in the late '40s communist subversive groups had been understood

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<sup>585</sup> 'The CPGB's Clandestine Activities and Security Measures', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 25

<sup>586</sup> 'The General Aims of the CPGB', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 7

<sup>587</sup> 'The CPGB's Clandestine Activities and Security Measures', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 25

<sup>588</sup> See TNA, KV 2/1597 & KV 2/1598 for an account of the MI5 investigation and subsequent trial.

<sup>589</sup> 'The CPGB's Clandestine Activities and Security Measures', Security Service report 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 26

predominantly as facilitators of Soviet espionage – granting Soviet intelligence a recruiting pool from which to select individuals with the correct temperament, ideological loyalty and access to sensitive information – by the early ‘60s Whitehall officials understood that the ultimate aims of British communism were political in nature and directed at garnering influence within wider left-wing institutions with the intent of gaining power. As stated by the Security Service:

‘The programme of the CPGB for obtaining power is essentially political and not industrial or subversive in the narrow sense of underground, conspiratorial, “bloody-revolutionary” activity. During the 1950s, however it got nowhere through purely political and parliamentary means because it was politically hamstrung by the Labour Party’s ban on known Communists in its ranks... The object of its penetration of the unions, however, remained essentially political. As Peter Kerrigan, the Party’s Industrial Organiser, wrote in ‘World News’ (November 26<sup>th</sup> 1960), “We have always said that the way to change the policy and leadership of the Labour Party is through the trade unions.” The CPGB has accordingly placed all its emphasis on the Labour Movement as a whole as opposed to the Labour Party in particular, and aims to control the latter through the former by a skilful use of its penetration of the trade unions.’<sup>590</sup>

With official understanding by 1961 being that the threat to British security emanating from the CPGB was ultimately political rather than security-based in nature, the need for direct counter-measures was lessened and a reliance upon counter-propaganda tolerated. Although the CPGB was a ‘fundamentally revolutionary party’ which was ‘thoroughly disloyal and with not more than tactical respect for existing law and order’ its continued desire to remain a legal and acceptable party meant that its threat and ambitions could be effectively managed via indirect means. The Party was engaged in an attack ‘offensive and defensive, open and concealed’<sup>591</sup> however the fact that its political strategy as of the late 1960s meant that it could not afford to be caught breaking the law gave Whitehall a degree of leeway in how best to counter CPGB machinations.

### **Judicial options for countering subversion**

This was, in many ways a considerable blessing for the government. Indeed, when reviewing the period it is remarkable to witness just how slight legal provisions were for dealing with not only subversive activity, but also outright espionage. Though, as

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<sup>590</sup> Appendix to Security Service report ‘Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures’, March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 9

<sup>591</sup> ‘The CPGB’s Clandestine Activities and Security Measures’, Security Service report ‘Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures’, March 1961, TNA, CAB 134/1346, p. 28

previously discussed, this problem had received considerable examination by both the Attlee and Churchill governments, by the early 1960s the Macmillan administration was still no closer to an acceptable solution. The fundamental problem of formulating an exact legal definition of ‘subversion’ and ‘subversive’ remained intractable. As such, the ability of successive governments to secure successful prosecution of subversives was ultimately fairly limited. Conviction for subversive activities was essentially dependent upon successful prosecution under the Official Secrets Act, whilst evidence to secure such would often be either undesirable to admit in open court or indeed outright inadmissible. Such a fact is demonstrated well by an examination of the more concrete issue of espionage. As a succession of cases during the early 1960s proved, the government struggled even to secure successful prosecution for espionage – thereby indicating that it would be nigh on impossible for the State to predicate a case on the considerably more nebulous grounds of ‘subversive activity’. This problem had been brought to the fore during 1958/59, when the return of Guy Burgess to the United Kingdom (in order to tend to his sick and elderly mother)<sup>592</sup> seemed a very real possibility. The news provoked consternation at the very highest levels of government – prompting a full Cabinet meeting on the matter in February 1959. Official options were less than satisfactory:

‘We have reviewed the evidence against Burgess and are satisfied that it is quite insufficient to sustain a prosecution under Section I [penalties for espionage]<sup>593</sup> of the Official Secrets Acts. Nor does it seem likely that any further evidence will be found. We cannot hope to obtain legal proof that Burgess has committed any treasonable act while in the Soviet Union or any seditious act here. Evidence does exist that he has committed technical breaches of Section II [wrongful communication of information] of the Official Secrets Acts, insofar as he has improperly retained official classified documents in his possession. But these documents are of little significance and the Attorney-General would not be willing to proceed on such a minor charge. It will therefore be impossible to dissuade Burgess from trying to return to this country by confronting him with evidence on which he might be prosecuted. Indeed if he knew how little evidence we had, he would be more likely to be encouraged than deterred. This applies also to a possible prosecution for homosexuality’<sup>594</sup>

Even when confronted by one of the most severe cases of espionage to trouble British security in the post-war era, Whitehall still could not secure prosecution. If the British government could not guarantee the successful prosecution of a major foreign agent such as Burgess, it held little hope of utilising the same legislation as an effective counter to the comparatively slighter issue subversive activity. Individuals had to be caught

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<sup>592</sup> Andrew Lownie, *Stalin’s Englishman*, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 2015), pp. 298-299. The Security Service was less than sympathetic – notes in the margins of intercepted letters between Burgess and his mother refer to the tone as ‘nauseating’. Serial 1227, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1959, TNA, KV 2/4129

<sup>593</sup> Official Secrets Act 1911 (1 & 2 Geo 5 c 28) & Official Secrets Act 1939 (2 & 3 Geo. 6 c. 121)

<sup>594</sup> Minutes of Cabinet meeting, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1959, TNA, KV 2/4128

essentially red-handed in order for conviction to be obtained – as in the case of the Portland spies – an episode whereby the Admiralty Underwater Weapons Establishment based at Portland was discovered, by way of a tip-off passed to American intelligence, to have been penetrated by a Soviet spy ring.<sup>595</sup> The group, which consisted of a disaffected former Naval master-at-arms (Harry Houghton), his lover, as well as three Soviet ‘illegals’ (i.e. – Soviet nationals acting as espionage agents without diplomatic cover) had been passing considerable amounts of data concerning British naval research and development efforts to Soviet intelligence since the early 1950s. On their arrest in January 1961, members of the group were found to have in their immediate possession large quantities of classified film and photography related to HMS Dreadnought (the Royal Navy’s first nuclear submarine)<sup>596</sup> as well as the technical specifications for naval engine components.<sup>597</sup> Meanwhile, arresting Special Branch officers (member of the Security Service, of course, having no powers of arrest) discovered cryptographic broadcasting equipment once certain members of the group’s homes were raided.<sup>598</sup> With such overwhelming evidence to hand, the government could achieve successful prosecution in a relatively straightforward manner – in the case of the Portland ring sentences between fifteen and twenty years were handed down at Bow Street Magistrates Court in March 1961.<sup>599</sup> To obtain successful prosecution under the Official Secrets Act the government had either to obtain confession from the perpetrator(s) or otherwise catch them in the act of misappropriating or conveying sensitive material to hostile third parties.<sup>600</sup>

The succession of espionage scandals which followed the Portland Case – and were in part eventually to force the resignation of Harold Macmillan in October 1963 – showed the dangers inherent to overzealous application of the Official Secrets Act(s) however. The prosecution of George Blake in May 1961 was a particular case in point. Blake had served as an intelligence officer with SIS since the Second World War – initially on secondment from the Royal Navy and from 1947 as a permanent employee – helping to build up the Dutch intelligence network during the War before moving to Hamburg at the

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<sup>595</sup> Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer*, (Viking, London, 1987) p. 128

<sup>596</sup> Peter Hennessy & James Jinks, *The Silent Deep: The Royal Navy Submarine Service since 1945*, (Allen Lane, London, 2015), pp. 187-188

<sup>597</sup> John Bulloch and Henry Miller, *Spy Ring: The Full Story of the Naval Secrets Case*, (Secker & Warburg, London, 1961), pp. 166-170

<sup>598</sup> Wright, *Spycatcher*, p. 138

<sup>599</sup> Bulloch & Miller, *Spy Ring*, pp. 214-215

<sup>600</sup> Again, Vassal’s conviction was secured following a full confession, John Vassall, *Vassall: The Autobiography of a Spy*, (Sidgwick & Jackson, London, 1975), pp. 139-143

conflict's end, where he was entrusted with developing intelligence networks in East Germany.<sup>601</sup> At the end of 1947, Blake was posted to South Korea as Vice-Consul to the British delegation – his brief being to recruit agents in the north-eastern provinces of China and eastern regions of the USSR.<sup>602</sup> Following the outbreak of war in June 1950 and subsequent invasion of the South by North Vietnamese troops, Blake and the rest of the British legation were taken into custody – leading Blake to spend the next three years in North Vietnamese custody. During his time imprisoned in a North Vietnamese internment camp, Blake was converted to communism.<sup>603</sup> Following release in spring 1953, Blake subsequently met with KGB officers stationed in London and agreed to begin spying for the USSR. From October 1953, until his eventual discovery by British intelligence in 1961 as a result of the revelations of Polish defector Michael Goleniewski (a former Polish intelligence officer who had defected to the United States in the January of that year), Blake worked to systematically undermine every British intelligence program to which he had access. Most notably, Blake passed to Soviet intelligence full details regarding the names and identities of numerous British agents (estimates vary) working behind the Iron Curtain as well as the details of the joint US/UK operation to tunnel into East Berlin and tap into the telephone lines of Soviet Army Headquarters.<sup>604</sup>

The discovery of Blake's treachery was thus understandably embarrassing for the government particularly given ongoing efforts at the time to cultivate good relations with the newly elected Kennedy administration in the United States.<sup>605</sup> As such, the decision was made to set an example in the court-room. The unorthodox decision was taken to split his period as a double-agent into five separate periods – each able to be individually tried and sentenced under provision one of the Official Secrets Act. Addressing the judge for only eight minutes, Sir Reginald Manningham-Buller QC (whose daughter, Eliza Manningham-Buller would go on to serve as Director General of MI5 in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) asserted that due to Blake's access to 'information of very great

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<sup>601</sup> H. Montgomery Hyde, *George Blake: Superspy*, (Constable, London, 1987), pp. 24-29

<sup>602</sup> Roger Hermiston, *The Greatest Traitor: The Secret Lives of Agent George Blake*, (Aurum Press, London, 2013), pp. 84-85

<sup>603</sup> Richard J. Aldrich, *GCHQ*, (HarperPress, London, 2011), p. 175

<sup>604</sup> *On the Front Lines of the Cold War: Documents on the Intelligence War in Berlin, 1946 to 1961*, ed. Donald P. Steury, (CIA Center for the Study of Intelligence, VA, 2007), accessed via: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/on-the-front-lines-of-the-cold-war-documents-on-the-intelligence-war-in-berlin-1946-to-1961/art-7.html#rft8>

<sup>605</sup> Fortunately, Kennedy became rather more preoccupied with the Bay of Pigs debacle, which broke two days after Blake's confession.



importance' it was the Crown's case that he had inflicted 'most serious damage to the interests of this country'.<sup>606</sup> Blake had already admitted his guilt following his arrest in April 1961, making acquittal impossible – the defending barrister Jeremy Hutchinson QC (who also defended John Vassal, the Committee of 100 & Christine Keeler, amongst others)<sup>607</sup> made the best out of a bad situation and argued in mitigation that Blake's conversion to communism had occurred whilst under severe duress, that as an immigrant he could not be held to the same standards of loyalty as an 'ordinary Englishman'<sup>608</sup> and that he never intended the information he passed on to the USSR to cause direct harm to the United Kingdom – only to frustrate Western offensive espionage efforts.<sup>609</sup> Such arguments, perhaps predictably, were not enough to sway the presiding judge – Lord Chief Justice Parker (already possessed of something of a severe reputation following his imprisonment of Brendan Mulholland of the *Daily Mail* and Reginald Foster of the *Daily Sketch* for refusing to reveal sources during the Vassal tribunal)<sup>610</sup> – who proceeded to hand down a sentence of 14 years (the highest penalty available under the Official Secrets Act) for each count of espionage, thereby amounting to a total sentence of forty-two years imprisonment (certain sentences were instructed to be served concurrently with each other).<sup>611</sup>

Though Blake was undoubtedly deserving of punishment – his actions had fundamentally undermined British espionage activity in East Germany, the Stasi judged that 'Blake's work substantially laid the foundations for the liquidation of British secret service agents in the GDR',<sup>612</sup> and had cost hundreds of individuals both their freedom and in many cases their lives – by enacting such a severe punishment (Blake's was the longest sentence to be handed down by a British court until the conviction of Nezar Hindawi for the attempted bombing of a Israeli passenger jet in 1986)<sup>613</sup> Lord Justice Parker essentially altered the nature of the trial from being a criminal proceeding to being a matter of politics. Even the Prime Minister judged that the Parker had meted out a 'rather

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<sup>606</sup> Statement of Harold Macmillan to the House of Commons, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1961, *Hansard*, Vol. 639, cc1609-18

<sup>607</sup> See, Thomas Grant, *Jeremy Hutchinson's Case Histories*, (John Murray, London, 2015), for a full account of Hutchinson's career.

<sup>608</sup> Grant, *Hutchinson's Case Histories*, p. 59

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61

<sup>610</sup> Stewart Purvis & Jeff Hulbert, *When Reporters Cross the Line: the Heroes, the Villains, the Hackers and the Spies*, (Biteback Publishing, London, 2013), pp. 169 -175

<sup>611</sup> *R v Blake*. (1962) 2 QB 377, (1961) 45 Cr. App. R. 292, CCA

<sup>612</sup> Report by Stasi counter-intelligence, 1962, op cit. Hermiston, *The Greatest Traitor* p. 182

<sup>613</sup> *R. v Hindawi*, (1988), 10 Cr. App. R(S) 104.

savage sentence',<sup>614</sup> Sir Dick White (now head of SIS) expressed shock at the sentence,<sup>615</sup> whilst Hutchinson argued in the subsequent appeal (which was denied) that such a sentence was 'so inhumane that it was alien to all the principles on which a civilized country would treat its subjects'<sup>616</sup> and faced with such a sentence a man had only the option to 'lose his sanity or gain his freedom'.<sup>617</sup> Such words would prove oddly prophetic as Blake duly escaped from Wormwood Scrubs prison on the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1966. Blake himself would later attribute much of the success of his escape to the severity of the sentence imposed upon him:

'The sentence was such that it was almost a question of honour to challenge it. Moreover I looked upon myself as a political prisoner and as such, like a POW, had a duty to escape... It is to this long sentence that I owe my freedom. It secured me the sympathy not only of many of my fellow inmates, but also of the prison staff. It made me determined to attempt to break out of prison, as I truly could say that I had nothing to lose but my chains... Had I been given fourteen years... it would have excited much less interest and sympathy in others. And very likely, I would have served my sentence to the end.'<sup>618</sup>

Though, where legally feasible, the judicial hammer may have been a satisfying option for the government to turn to in the short-term – reassuring ministers, as well as allies, that Britain was tough on espionage (J Edgar Hoover was particularly approving of the sentence, telling MI5's Liaison Officer in Washington that 'The British have guts!')<sup>619</sup> – over-zealous application of judicial measures was ultimately detrimental to Whitehall's position. Meanwhile, of course, the prosecution of subversives and other agents of espionage always bore the side-effect of exposing the government to criticism that it was doing less than it should to ensure British security. Macmillan's oft-quoted outburst following the news that John Vassall had been caught spying for the USSR illustrates this point nicely:

'No, I'm not at all pleased. When my gamekeeper shoots a fox, he doesn't go and hang it up outside the Master of Foxhounds' drawing room; he buries it out of sight. But you can't just shoot a spy as you did in the war. You have to try him... better to discover him, and then control him, but never catch him... There will be a terrible row in the press, there will be a debate in the House of Commons and the government will probably fall. Why the devil did you 'catch' him?'<sup>620</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> Diary entry for the 4<sup>th</sup> May 1961, Harold Macmillan, *Macmillan Diaries: Vol. II*, ed. Peter Catterall, (Pan Macmillan, London, 2014) p. 380

<sup>615</sup> Interview with Sir Dick White, as cited by Tom Bower, *The Perfect English Spy: Sir Dick White and the Secret War 1935-90*, (St Martin's Press, London, 1995), p. 268

<sup>616</sup> Grant, *Hutchinson's Case Histories*, p. 65

<sup>617</sup> Ibid.

<sup>618</sup> George Blake, *No Other Choice*, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1990) p. 211

<sup>619</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 491

<sup>620</sup> Recollections of Harold Macmillan, op cit. Alistair Horne, *Macmillan: The Official Biography, Vol. II*, (Macmillan, London, 1989), pp. 460-461

Out and out spy trials had the tendency to attract only negative publicity for the government. Indeed, it could be argued that the successive espionage scandals which enveloped Macmillan's government did far more to undermine its authority than communists – or indeed any other subversive group – could possibly have dreamed of. Somewhat ironically meanwhile, the Profumo affair, the case which in the view of Macmillan's private secretary John Wyndham 'did more harm than anything else in the whole of his administration'<sup>621</sup> had in reality no real implications for national security. Minister of War John 'Jack' Profumo's brief affair with showgirl Christine Keeler in 1961 arguably did more to damage the standing of the Conservative government than any other scandal during Macmillan's administration. Once the story broke in 1963, a substantial proportion of press and Labour opposition outrage was predicated on Keeler's ties to Yevgeny Ivanov, the Soviet naval attaché, who was alleged to have been engaged in a sexual relationship with Keeler during the same period as Profumo's liaison.<sup>622</sup> MI5's investigation of the matter concluded however that it was highly unlikely that Keeler could have passed on any particularly sensitive information to Ivanov: 'Although undoubtedly attractive, Keeler was vacuous and untruthful. Ivanov had no need to sleep with her to discover that'.<sup>623</sup> A similar conclusion was reached by US officials, who regarded the affair as a matter of public hysteria rather than genuine security scandal. As communicated by the US embassy in London to Kennedy's National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy:

'The enclosure (the report included a copy of News of the World's initial expose of the affair, complete with famous photograph of Keeler posing nude in a strategically positioned chair) shows to what depths British journalism has sunk over the Profumo affair... There is an 18th Century ring about the dog collar and chain.'<sup>624</sup>

There is a deep irony to the fact that the case which, due the tremendous publicity which surrounded it, arguably most shaped public perceptions of subversion had in actuality almost no security dimension whatsoever. As a result of successive espionage scandals, both real and imagined, the Macmillan government found itself politically crippled by 1963, with the Prime Minister himself stepping down in the October of that year. A US

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<sup>621</sup> John Wyndham on the Profumo Affair, op cit. Richard Davenport-Hines, *An English Affair: Sex, Class and Power in the Age of Profumo*, (Harper Press, London, 2013), p. 328

<sup>622</sup> Ibid, pp. 248-249

<sup>623</sup> Security Service investigation into the Profumo affair, op cit. Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 494

<sup>624</sup> US Embassy, London (exact identity of the sender unknown) to McGeorge Bundy, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, JFKNSF, Box 171a, United Kingdom Subjects

Presidential briefing provided to John F. Kennedy that same year regarding the state of British politics summates the situation rather well:

‘The Conservative government is in a sad state... it has run down dreadfully. Its solid achievements are largely forgotten. People are bored with it and fed up with it. They feel as if it has been in office forever... Today that government can do nothing right. It seems hopelessly accident prone. It is detested by most of the press. It is derided on radio and television. Comedians make savage jokes about it. It sinks steadily in the public opinion polls under the weight of old age, unemployment, Soviet espionage, the Common Market failure, Skybolt<sup>625</sup> and personal scandal. It reeks of decay; and the press and the opposition, sensing a rout, are moving in for the kill.’<sup>626</sup>

The public exposure of espionage cases often had the tendency to result in embarrassment and humiliation for the Macmillan government, a factor which helped contribute to the administration’s destabilisation by late 1963. Therefore it follows that, where possible, it was far better for all official action to remain covert and utilise the assistance of non-official third parties to secure favourable anti-communist results. Overt action was fraught with peril and tended to be accompanied by heavy political cost. The Electrical Trades Union case was in large part so successful in undermining communist support due to its status as a civil case brought by private individuals against their employer – the wider public had little idea of the extent to which Whitehall had carefully funnelled information and directed press attention so as to ensure that the case received both a favourable outcome as well as considerable media attention. With all of this in mind, it is easy to see why both MI5 and the AC (H) continued to favour covert surveillance of communist subversives coupled with counter-propaganda as the bedrock of counter-subversion policy. Direct counter-measures attempted via the British legal system would likely have resulted only in either failed prosecution for lack of acceptable evidence, or would have carried so great a political cost as to outweigh any potential good which could have been gained from the disruption of the communist movement. As demonstrated, the options provided by legislative measures were inflexible at best and potentially counter-productive at worst. As such, deniable anti-communist propaganda remained the government’s best tool in its struggle against the British communist movement. Judicial measures were typically likely to fail against subversive threats, whilst if successful prosecution was, by some outside chance, obtained the overall result would almost

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<sup>625</sup> Air launched US nuclear missile system, which was fully committed to by the Macmillan government as its chosen nuclear deterrent. Axed by the Pentagon in 1962 following evidence that the missile system was already obsolete, greatly embarrassing Whitehall.

<sup>626</sup> ‘The British Political Situation’, Memorandum for the President, March 25<sup>th</sup> 1963, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Presidential Papers, National Security Files, JFKNSF, Box 171, United Kingdom General, NLK-93-98

certainly be detrimental to the government's position – engendering public sympathy for communists, rather than dissuading further subversive activity.

### **Espionage, and Readiness for War**

Such cases are also indicative of a secondary trend – over the early 1960s it became increasingly apparent that the vast majority of espionage threats to the security of the United Kingdom did not originate from the domestic communist movement. George Blake's conversion to communism had occurred whilst incarcerated in North Korea – far from the, by comparison strikingly genteel surrounds, of CPGB headquarters on London's King Street.<sup>627</sup> Vassal's betrayal meanwhile was a product not of ideological devotion, but rather Soviet intelligence's exploitation of the civil servant's homosexuality in a classic 'honey trap' scenario.<sup>628</sup> Kim Philby – whose dramatic flight from Beirut in January 1963 finally proved irrefutably his employ as a Soviet agent – was perhaps the exception. His treachery had been initially facilitated by the British communist movement, whilst much of his initial exposure and conversion to Soviet-communism had been a result of subversive groups. The subversive element of his case was however ultimately historical and the relatively favourable climate for British communists of the 1930s certainly did not exist in Britain by the early years of the 1960s. Meanwhile, political circumstances in Britain were indicative of a broadening subversive threat more disparate in nature than British communism had been since it had assumed its position of central concern to ministers in the late 1940s. In many ways, the stability of the State over the period from 1960-1964 appeared to Whitehall to be on the whole be threatened more by the unilateralist movement, and indeed the actions of the government's own ministers, than by the domestic communism. The tactics of the Committee of 100,<sup>629</sup> focused as they were upon direct action as opposed to CND's strategy of non-violent protest, possessed far greater potential for the disruption of immediate British national security than did

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<sup>627</sup> Sold in 1976 and now, ironically, a branch of HSBC

<sup>628</sup> Homosexuality in the FO had been formally proscribed since Burgess & Maclean's defections, thus opening up opportunities for blackmail by Soviet intelligence. 'Homosexuality in the Foreign Service', Memorandum by the FO, 1953, TNA, FO 158/177

<sup>629</sup> Nuclear protest group formed in 1960 which advocated non-violent resistance and civil disobedience as the most effective strategy by which to pursue unilateralism. For motives behind the group's formation see Bertrand Russell, "Civil Disobedience", *New Statesman*, 17 February 1961

British communism. As stated by Sir Hugh Fraser (then Secretary of State for Air) to Harold Macmillan and Henry Brooke (Home Secretary) in 1963:

‘I must reiterate the concern which I expressed to you earlier this week. These demonstrations are aimed at operational airfields, at which armed aircraft are at constant readiness. I can only prevent interference with the operational effectiveness of RAF and USAF bases by providing protection which involves a heavy drain on RAF resources and their normal tasks. Sooner or later, the Committee of 100 will realize that a relatively small effort on their part can impose a significant reduction in the efficiency of our deterrent bases or a disproportionate effort to prevent this. Moreover, if these demonstrations recur (and not all the demonstrators appear to act on strictly pacifist principles) there is an obvious risk of ugly incidents.’<sup>630</sup>

Nuclear readiness in 1963, a matter at the very forefront of the cabinet’s security concerns as a result of October 1962’s Cuban Missile Crisis, was threatened most significantly in the eyes of ministers not by domestic communism, but rather by the threat of direct action from the more radical wing of the unilateralist movement. Moreover, beyond the immediate danger such demonstrations posed to matters of security, potential diplomatic and political repercussions were equally troubling – the continued presence of American service personnel, equipment and nuclear warheads on British soil complicating matters still further. The American attitude to the Committee of 100, as communicated directly to the Prime Minister, was straightforward – if blunt:

‘The USAF have made it clear that they cannot permit the demonstrations (planned to occur at Third USAF Headquarters at Ruislip & the USAF nuclear bases located at Wethersfield, Essex and Brize Norton in Oxfordshire) to impair the operational capability of the bases. They have said that if demonstrators persist in approaching sensitive area, and disregard the orders of the sentries, the latter will be compelled to open fire... They are willing to leave the protection of the airfield (other than the close protection of sensitive areas) to the UK authorities and have asked us to do all we can to avoid a direct clash between demonstrators and USAF personnel.’<sup>631</sup>

Ergo, by 1961 it could be convincingly argued that the readiness of Britain’s national security was threatened more by unilateralist direct action than by the communist movement. It is difficult to overstate the scale of domestic political damage that would have been inflicted upon the Macmillan government had US troops opened fire upon British citizens, protesting a not unpopular cause within the territorial confines of the United Kingdom. Such an incident would almost certainly have precipitated a vote of no confidence in Macmillan’s leadership within the House of Commons whilst inflicting deep damage and embarrassment to British relations with the United States. A particularly grave consequence when it is taken into account that since 1958’s reluctant

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<sup>630</sup> Hugh Fraser to Harold Macmillan and Henry Brooke, 16<sup>th</sup> May 1963, TNA, PREM 11/4284

<sup>631</sup> Julian Amery (Secretary of State for Air), to Harold Macmillan, 5<sup>th</sup> December 1961, TNA, PREM 11/4284. Macmillan replied giving full authority for all actions short of shooting. Macmillan to Amery, 6<sup>th</sup> December 1961, TNA, PREM 11/4284

adoption of the Thor missile system,<sup>632</sup> the United Kingdom was wholly reliant on continued US co-operation for the purchase and deployment of nuclear weaponry. Further to this, it is interesting to note that the JIC adopted a similar line to Committee of 100 protesters as it had members of the Communist Party some 15 years prior. In case of transition to war, the Committee judged:

‘If hostilities are imminent, natural loyalties will come into play and only a minority (of unilateralists) will be prepared to take active steps to impede to operation of the bases. A similar state of affairs will be obtained in the Communist Party, which will lose much rank and file support. Those who continue to accept the Party’s discipline, however, can be expected to be particularly militant, stimulated not only by a desire to help Russia but by a belief that, when it comes to a real crisis, provided everything has to be done to undermine their position, the imperialists will give in without a fight. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that while the number of nuclear disarmers and Communists will be considerably reduced in a period of tension, there will be a militant rump which will try to be as obstructive as possible.’<sup>633</sup>

Similar to plans for war drawn up under the Attlee government, it was decided in 1962 that in case of war, certain members of the disarmament movement should be included amongst those scheduled for detainment.<sup>634</sup> Though tremendously reduced from the early 1950s – Operation HILLARY had recommended close to 3000 people for internment, mainly communists, whilst the FELSTEAD committee recommended a mere 100 in total – it is interesting to note again the diversification of individuals perceived as dangerous to the State. The inclusion of the more militant individuals associated with the disarmament movement in a programme which previously had only been populated by communists and persons associated with hostile foreign intelligence agencies showed again just how seriously the government appraised the threat posed by the unilateral disarmament movement and particularly its direct action wing. Militant unilateralists’ willingness in the early ‘60s to overtly engage in illegal activity at the cost of personal imprisonment in order to achieve short-term disruption of British nuclear interests briefly made them of severe concern to Whitehall’s security planners. The briefness of this concern should be noted however – disarmament militancy was really only relevant up until 1963 – after which the harsh sentences imposed on earlier activism, combined with a general waning of enthusiasm across the unilateralist movement, began to have significant impact on the frequency of anti-nuclear civil disobedience.<sup>635</sup> The imprisonments of Patrick Pottle and Michael Randle following their involvement in protests held at RAF Wethersfield in 1962

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<sup>632</sup> See minute sheet for TNA, AIR 21/4561 for a sense of the level of griping across both Whitehall and the armed forces which accompanied the adoption of Thor.

<sup>633</sup> ‘Anti-Nuclear Demonstration at RAF Airfields in a Period of Tension’, JIC (62), 16<sup>th</sup> November 1962, TNA, CAB 158/47, op cit. Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State*, (Allen Lane, London, 2010), p. 118

<sup>634</sup> Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 118

<sup>635</sup> Dave Peers, ‘The Impasse of CND’, *International Socialism*, no. 12, Spring 1963, pp. 6-11

in particular helped to deprive militant unilateralists of much of their early momentum.<sup>636</sup> The British communist movement by contrast, though undoubtedly possessed of similar overall intent lacked by this point the means by which to seriously damage Whitehall's credibility and political stability as well as the willingness to expose itself to legal punishment – as MI5's assessment of the CPGB showed.

Given the correlation in dates, it seems likely that the events of the Cuban Missile crisis in October 1962 provided the final catalyst for the decline in concern regarding domestic communist subversion. The crisis, which took the form of a tense stand-off between the United States and Soviet governments following the deployment of Soviet nuclear warheads to Cuba, highlighted to both the public and officialdom alike the point that should war with the USSR come, the end result would be total nuclear annihilation within a matter of hours, if not minutes. To quote Pete Townshend:

'In the middle of the first term of my second year [of art school], the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted. On the critical day in October 1962 I walked to college absolutely certain that life was over; why was I even bothering to attend class? When the end didn't come, I was glad not to have been one of those who had panicked, wept or chattered compulsively until the good news was announced.'<sup>637</sup>

The government had been aware of the level of destruction which could be expected in the event of a hydrogen bomb detonation over the United Kingdom since studies were first commissioned in the mid-1950s,<sup>638</sup> however had persevered under the delusion that thermonuclear attack would be survivable. As indicated by the Strath Committee report – which was issued in 1955 and laid out the government's response to nuclear attack in full – defence planners continued to insist through the mid-1950s that counter-subversive action would be required following a nuclear exchange:

'In some parts of the country... there might be complete chaos for a time and civil control would collapse. In such circumstances the local military commander would have to be prepared to take over from the civil authority responsibility for the maintenance of law and order and for the administration of government. He

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<sup>636</sup> Although once incarcerated in Wormwood Scrubs the pair proceeded to facilitate George Blake's escape, so imprisonment was, perhaps, counter-productive. See Michael Randle & Pat Pottle, *The Blake Escape: How We Freed George Blake and Why*, (Harrap, London, 1989)

<sup>637</sup> Pete Townshend, *Who I Am*, (HarperCollins, London, 2012), pp.50-51. For further discussion of the subject of public memories of the crisis, see Christopher Andrew, 'Remembering the Cuban Missile Crisis: memoirs, oral history and *lieux de memoire*', *An International History of the Cuban Missile Crisis: A 50-year Retrospective*, ed. David Gioe, Len Scott & Christopher Andrew, (Routledge, London, 2014)

<sup>638</sup> 'Radioactive Fall-Out from Hydrogen Bomb', Atomic Energy Research Establishment study, 8<sup>th</sup> October 1954, TNA, DEFE 7/2208. The charts showing the extent of lethal radiation superimposed over maps of densely populated areas of the UK make for particularly chilling reading



would, if called upon, exercise his existing common-law powers to take whatever steps, however drastic, he considered necessary to restore order.’<sup>639</sup>

Such a view was not shared by the Security Service. By 1956, the Director General of the Service Roger Hollis had realised that ‘it was no good envisioning an organised Head Office existing anywhere; indeed there would be nothing to do’. No plans were made for the vast majority of MI5’s staff in the event of nuclear war beyond token provisions for two to three senior officers to enter TURNSTILE, the government bunker constructed beneath the Cotswolds.<sup>640</sup> Such a stance represented a wholesale reversal of the Service’s position at the beginning of the Second World War, at which point a tremendous amount of resources were committed to frustrating the (largely imagined) efforts of suspected fifth columnists.<sup>641</sup> Throughout the Cuban crisis meanwhile, MI5’s staff were not briefed regarding developments in the Caribbean, nor were they formally notified at the event’s end.<sup>642</sup> The Service’s lack of activity appears to confirm that Hollis’ theorisation, bleak though it was, was accepted by MI5’s senior staff. In the case of thermo-nuclear war with the Soviet Union, there would be little call for the enforcement of domestic security; the entirety of the country, communists, civil servants, factory workers and soldiers alike would soon be so much smouldering ash. This being said, even post-Cuba delusions that government representatives would be troubled by subversive elements persisted amongst defence planners. As stated within the Defence Policy Staff’s 1968 paper for the Chiefs of Staff entitled ‘Military aspects of the Home Defence of the United Kingdom’:

‘The possibility of widespread strikes including a breakdown in our public transport and shipping systems could seriously affect our delicately programmed mobilisation and movement plans... Anti-war action might spread and involve considerable numbers of normally stable and law-abiding people. The Soviet bloc could bring to bear the full weight of their subversive activities, sabotage and psychological warfare... Subversive organisations are likely to survive and the general chaos of the post-attack struggle could provide a better opportunity for them to succeed than anything which could be obtained pre-attack.’<sup>643</sup>

The Service was leery of this sort of thinking as early as the late 1940s. As recorded by Guy Liddell in 1949:

‘In regard to malicious damage we should say something about our experiences during the war, when large numbers of cases were investigated. In no case was the act found to be due to enemy action, and in many

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<sup>639</sup> Minutes of the Home Defence (Strath) Committee, 17<sup>th</sup> March 1955, TNA, CAB 134/940, op cit. Hennessy, *Secret State*, p. 171

<sup>640</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 329

<sup>641</sup> Ibid. pp. 229-230

<sup>642</sup> Ibid. p. 329

<sup>643</sup> ‘Military Aspects of the Home Defence of the United Kingdom’, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1968, TNA, DEFE 4/232, op cit. Hennessy, *Secret State*, pp. 206-207

cases where the solution was found the act was due either to some disgruntled element, or to negligence, through bad inspection, or to a desire by a firm to find an excuse for incompetent work.<sup>644</sup>

Whether mass acts of sabotage by enemy agents and subversive would have occurred was a highly debateable point. The logic of the argument was sound, however the evidence of World War Two indicated that such fears tended to be overblown. Similar conclusions were expressed to the defence staff in 1968:

‘The USSR probably still has some capability for sabotage in the United Kingdom, though the likelihood of its being used in a period of tension is questionable; there is no evidence to suggest other organisations have sabotage plans on a substantial scale, though the possibility of isolated acts by individuals cannot be ruled out.’<sup>645</sup>

In the event of war, the likelihood of wide-spread sabotage by subversive groups was low. Meanwhile, in any event, from the Service’s point of view such matters were ultimately irrelevant. MI5 leadership realised as early as 1956 that such was the destructive potential of hydrogen weaponry that minor matters such as sabotage were of trifling importance. Though the defence staff may have continued to fret about fifth columnists, for reasons which in hindsight appear at best self-delusional, for those tasked explicitly with the study and practice of counter-subversion it was clear that in case of war such matters had been rendered irrelevant by the advance in destructive potential caused by the development of the hydrogen bomb.

As such, by the early 1960s two of the chief concerns which had raised counter-subversion as a priority appeared outdated. Domestic subversive movements clearly no longer provided the fulcrum of the Soviet Union’s espionage strategy – as the Blake and Vassall cases demonstrated. Meanwhile, the defence aspect of domestic communist subversion was removed as a going concern for the Security Service as a result of technological change. Disruption of the Communist Party in the case of war was lessened as a priority as such actions would almost certainly prove futile in the event of thermo-nuclear attack. Two key facets of Whitehall’s concern regarding subversive movements had thus been resolved by the latter years of the Macmillan government.

### **End of Ministerial Attention**

Final proof of domestic communism’s fall from the top of the list of governmental security priorities can be found in the quiet winding down of the Cabinet Committee on

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<sup>644</sup> Guy Liddell diary entry, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1949, TNA, KV 4/471

<sup>645</sup> ‘Security of the United Kingdom Base in the Pre-Attack Phase of General War’, Annex A, 1<sup>st</sup> October 1968, TNA, DEFE 4/232, op cit. Hennessy, *the Secret State*, p. 120

Communism (Home) over the course of 1963. The 18<sup>th</sup> December 1962 marked the final meeting of the group; notably for the first and only time not under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary Norman Brook (shortly to be elevated to the peerage as Lord Normanbrook as of January 1963)<sup>646</sup> since its convention in 1951. Its end was not formally planned – the minutes of the final meeting imply no sense of finality to proceedings – it simply failed to meet again after this date, such was the decrease in the relative importance of domestic communism as a security threat. Indeed, the slightly haphazard manner of its demise is demonstrated by the fact that the group remained officially on the list of Ministerial Committees until 7<sup>th</sup> January 1969 even despite the lack of activity.<sup>647</sup> In part this was a consequence of the proceedings of the late 1962 meeting – of which the main topic of discussion was a private letter (most likely from Sir Hartley Shawcross) received by Macmillan in November 1962.<sup>648</sup> The letter, whose substance was considered important enough to be recommended for official discussion by the Prime Minister, advocated for the creation of a small working-party to deliberate over questions of security and counter-subversion measures.<sup>649</sup> Whilst on the face of it this would seem equate to nothing more than the slightly unnecessary duplication of responsibilities covered already by the AC (H), the Committee nevertheless agreed with the letter's sentiments, justifying the decision on the grounds that the AC (H) was an increasingly unwieldy body, and recommended that a smaller ad-hoc working group be established.<sup>650</sup> Said working group (chaired by Sir Burke Trend, following Lord Normanbrook's retirement)<sup>651</sup> achieved little of note – its main accomplishment seems to have been penning an official letter to Benjamin Britten warning him against accepting the presidency of the British-Hungarian Friendship Society (Britten accepted the position regardless)<sup>652</sup> – however it did naturally divert attention away from the AC (H), leaving

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<sup>646</sup> 'Peerage announcements', *The London Gazette*, 25<sup>th</sup> January, no. 42903, p. 193

<sup>647</sup> 'Dissolution of the Committee', Note by the Secretary of the Cabinet, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1969, TNA, CAB 134/1347

<sup>648</sup> Though the Committee were not informed of the sender's identity, given Shawcross' regular correspondence with Macmillan on the issue of domestic communism over the same period it seems almost certain that the memorandum discussed is based on one of his letters. See TNA, PREM 11/4684

<sup>649</sup> Statement by Sir Burke Trend to the AC (H), 18<sup>th</sup> December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1347

<sup>650</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 18<sup>th</sup> December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1347

<sup>651</sup> Letter from Sir Burke Trend to Sir Charles Cunningham (Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Home Office 1957-1966) explaining the intended function of the new Working Party, 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1963, TNA, CAB 134/1349

<sup>652</sup> Letter from Sir Burke Trend to Sir Charles Cunningham expressing dismay at Britten's decision, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1963, TNA, CAB 21/6020

the main committee to wither.<sup>653</sup> Indeed there is evidence to suggest that the regular monitoring of communist activity was starting to be regarded as something of a joke by officials at this time. Notification of Britten's appointment to the British-Hungarian friendship society provided in the following manner:

'You should be aware of the existence of Communism in the Sunday Schools, among folk musicians and among the "Woodcraft Folk". And, more seriously, the attached minutes confirm that Benjamin Britten has become President of the British-Hungarian Friendship Society.'<sup>654</sup>

This being said, the committee's main offshoot – IRD's monthly bulletin of 'communist influenced activities' - continued to be circulated under the Committee's name until January 1964,<sup>655</sup> at which point full responsibility for its distribution was officially subsumed by the Foreign Office.<sup>656</sup> Indeed, IRD's English section would continue to operate full-time up until the formal dissolution of the Department as a whole in 1977.<sup>657</sup>

It follows that communist subversion did not cease to be regarded as a threat at any exact moment. Instead, it melded into a patchwork of numerous other subversive threats, all of which demanded official attention in some capacity, yet none of which were significant enough to warrant the sort of intense focus which had defined Whitehall's counter-subversive approach during the 1950s and later 1940s. 'Subversion' itself did not cease to be a concern for successive governments – it was simply considered to be far more varied in nature than had previously been the case. To look forward slightly, this much is demonstrated by the formation in 1968 of the Official Committee on Subversion at Home under Sir Burke Trend – the discussion surrounding the formation of the new body demonstrating the degree to which official thinking had shifted.

'The Official Committee on Communism (Home) has not met since 1962... In a recent submission, Sir Burke Trend suggested to the Prime Minister, who agreed, that the title might more appropriately be the Official Committee on Subversion (Home). Probably the best course would be to dissolve the Official Committee on Communism (Home) and its Working Group, and to replace them with an Official Committee on Subversion at Home, with a composition flexible enough to meet at Permanent Secretary or lower level as required, and with fairly broad terms of reference (which should, however, explicitly exclude counter-measures within the public service).'<sup>658</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> Though the Working Group's briefs are still retained by the Cabinet Office, so the possibility remains that its activities were more interesting than is currently indicated by the publically available files. See TNA, CAB 165/433

<sup>654</sup> Note from JH Robertson (Cabinet Office), to Sir Burke Trend, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1963, TNA, CAB 21/6020

<sup>655</sup> See file TNA, CAB 134/1349, which consists solely of IRD briefings from 1963, all devoid of any comment by the AC (H)

<sup>656</sup> 'Communist-Influenced Activities in the United Kingdom', Note by D. Heaton (Cabinet Office), 17<sup>th</sup> January 1964, TNA, CAB 21/6020

<sup>657</sup> Maguire, 'Counter-Subversion', p. 28

<sup>658</sup> D. Heaton to J.H. Waddell (Home Office), 30<sup>th</sup> September 1968, TNA, CAB 16/5432

This correspondence from a few years after the final meeting of AC (H) demonstrates that communism was now considered merely one amongst a myriad of threats – a direct contrast to deliberations in the later 1940s where exactly the opposite conclusion had been reached. Analysis of an MI5 report on subversion from 1967 (distributed to Harold Wilson) demonstrates similar thinking within the Service:

‘The subversive threat has become more diffuse. Phenomena like Protest and Flower People can present a threat to law and order but can become subversive when there is an element of organisation, be it only in a loose anarchical group. The Communist Party remains the most disciplined and highly organised subversive organisation and, with the possible exception of the Socialist Labour League, the only one capable of having a long-term strategy. Despite its pseudo-respectability and its overtures to the Left, it constitutes a threat by its very existence. Dissatisfaction with its gradualist approach, however, and the erosion of its discipline as a result of the Sino-Soviet dispute, have led to an increase in the nuisance value of those extremist organisations which lack the Communist Party’s fundamental discipline and are willing to take short-term risks. Here the threat impinges on law-and-order and is primarily a police responsibility. These groups however thrive on publicity and the less they are given the better.’<sup>659</sup>

By the time the Wilson government were elected into office in October 1964, domestic communism had been relegated from its position of centrality amongst Britain’s domestic subversive threats. This being said, the Party still maintained a position of importance within the panoply of subversive groups and organisations. As 1967’s report stated, its discipline and experience meant that it still retained a modicum of its old influence, particularly when compared to some of the more bizarre organisations listed in the document (the Free Wales Army of particular note in this regard).<sup>660</sup> Nevertheless, it follows that British communism was no longer deemed of such extreme importance as to warrant regular and continual ministerial attention from 1963 onwards. As has been demonstrated by Peter Hennessy in his revised 2010 edition of *The Secret State*, this diversification of subversive threats was to be the prevalent trend which would define future counter-subversion policy for at least the next decade. By the mid-1970s the Security Service categorised its list of ‘Subversive Organisations in the United Kingdom’ into a total of five categories, with no less than twenty-six parties, groups and

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<sup>659</sup> ‘Subversion in the United Kingdom – Autumn 1967’, paper by the Security Service, November 1967, TNA, PREM 13/1801

<sup>660</sup> Possessed of paramilitary pretensions, the FWA accomplished little other than being something of a running joke amongst members of the British security establishment. Their leader, William Julian Cayo-Evans, was described as ‘a small farmer of good family who mentally is scarcely an adolescent... His Army consists of himself and a handful of associates of much the same calibre.’ ‘Subversion in the United Kingdom – Autumn 1967’, paper by the Security Service, November 1967, TNA, PREM 13/1801. Not to be confused with Mudiad Amddiffyn Cymru (Movement for the Defence of Wales), another paramilitary group active in the same period who did succeed in carrying out a number of small-scale bombings and arson attacks. See Roy Clews, *To Dream of Freedom*, (Talybont, Ceredigion, 2001)

organisations contained within each.<sup>661</sup> ‘Orthodox Communist Organisations’ were joined by ‘Trotskyist, Anarchist and Extreme Left Organisation; Fascist Organisations; Nationalist Organisations (most notably the Irish Republican Army – notable only for their absence in the vast majority of early Cold War counter-subversion assessments)<sup>662</sup> and Racist Organisations’ as the main threats to the domestic security and political stability of the British state.<sup>663</sup> The combination of the anti-communist verdict in the ETU case, the failure of the CPGB to capitalise upon Labour disunity in the summer of 1961 and the steady occurrence of other major domestic security incidents unrelated to the domestic communist movement meant that British communism over the course of the 1960s was finally relegated from its position as the central domestic subversive concern for successive governments. British communism did not cease to be a subject of interest for the government – as demonstrated above, both the Wilson and Heath administrations maintained Security Service coverage of the movement, as indeed did the governments of Callaghan and Thatcher – however post-1963 it never captivated ministerial attention to quite the same degree as it had done since the end of the Second World War and throughout the 1950s.

## **Summary**

The early years of the 1960s was the period in which Whitehall realised that the varying components of the domestic communist threat had been largely resolved. Initially, the early years of the decade saw something of a resurgence of communism as a perceived threat to stability. Contrary to what events and analysis would have seemed to suggest in the later years of the 1950s, the British communist movement seemed to enjoy something of a brief renaissance between the Octobers of 1960 and 1961. Though the Hungarian revolution and subsequent exodus had appeared to indicate that the Party’s political influence was doomed to terminal decline, the Conservative Party’s surprising dominance in the 1959 General Election opened a rift within the mainstream left which seemed for a moment to offer the CPGB a route back to political relevance. The Parliamentary Labour

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<sup>661</sup> ‘Subversive Organisations in the United Kingdom’, Annex to JIC report ‘The Security of the United Kingdom Base in a Situation leading to a Threat of General War’, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1971, TNA, CAB 186/8

<sup>662</sup> In part due to the fact that the IRA were deemed to be the responsibility of Special Branch during the 1950s. As such, monitoring outside of regular police work was slight – see file TNA, KV 4/258. The key exception was monitoring of Sean Murray – a former IRA member who joined the Irish Communist Party in the ‘20s before becoming active in Northern Ireland in the 1940s. See file TNA, KV 2/1185

<sup>663</sup> ‘Subversive Organisations in the United Kingdom’, Annex to JIC report ‘The Security of the United Kingdom Base in a Situation leading to a Threat of General War’, 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1971, TNA, CAB 186/8

Party's disarray following its third successive electoral loss (and more importantly, its third consecutive loss of seats), coupled with the rise in popularity of the upstart unilateral disarmament movement gave the CPGB the two conditions it needed to potentially ingratiate itself within the mainstream political left, thereby gaining the legitimacy and influence it had craved essentially since its formation as a political party in July 1920. By aligning itself with the unilateralist movement, a position it had long opposed due to Moscow's multilateralism, the CPGB appeared to have found a mechanism whereby it could weaken the position of the Labour leadership and facilitate the accession of individuals who would look more favourably upon the Party. That such a scheme was at least vaguely plausible was indicated not only by the fact that the Party were able to secure pro-unilateralist votes at both the 1960 TUC and Labour Party conferences, but also by just how seriously the Security Service regarded the scenario in its thorough review of the communist movement from late 1960 to mid-1961. That the Service were so concerned again reinforces the argument that the failure of communism to encroachment in Britain deemed to partly be a result of Whitehall policy, but a policy which was strongly reliant upon the existence of the Labour Party as a moderate and politically strong left-wing party.

Such fears were not to last however, the CPGB's brief spark of activity in 1960 was a political last hurrah rather than a sign of improved fortune. The Communist Party lacked the necessary influence to sustain its attempted manipulation of the unions for more than a year. Meanwhile, Hugh Gaitskell's easy victory in the Labour leadership contest at Blackpool in the October of 1961 made it clear that any left-wing insurrection within Labour was over, removing what had been the CPGB's last slim chance of entry into the Labour tent. Meanwhile, the success of the anti-communist campaign which took place within the ETU – driven by private individuals and culminating in a civil court case, but supported heavily by the covert government channelling of information – finally ended the communist threat within the unions. The exposure of the communist ETU executive as fundamentally dishonest destroyed what remaining credibility communism had within the trade unions – whilst communists hung on in occasional bastions, their popularity within British industry more widely plummeted. Crucially, this victory was obtained without suspicion either on the part of the public or indeed the CPGB that the government had been in any way involved. Though both the Security Service and IRD had been instrumental in directing press attention towards the case as well as obtaining information

which proved communist wrong-doing, the public's ignorance of their involvement allowed the affair to play out unhindered by suspicions of political motivation – exacerbating the damage done to communist credibility. Indeed the success of the ETU case bolstered governmental conviction that its counter-communist policy – with a heavy focus upon counter-propaganda and covert information channelling – was largely correct in its assumptions. It was as well it was, for as the succession of espionage cases which were to plague the Macmillan administration showed, the Official Secrets Act could not be relied upon as an effective counter-measure towards deterring subversive activity.

Meanwhile, it was these same espionage cases which demonstrated that security assumptions regarding domestic communism's importance to Soviet intelligence were increasingly outdated. Where the Gouzenko affair and atom spy cases of the late 1940s and early '50s had seemed to indicate the importance of the domestic communist movement as a recruiting pool from which Soviet intelligence could acquire highly placed and ideologically committed agents, the succession of espionage scandals of the early '60s proved that this assumption was at best outdated and at worst fundamentally flawed. None of the major spy scandals (with the exception of Kim Philby for historical reasons) had their roots in domestic communism and none would have been prevented via a more thorough or pervasive application of counter-subversive strategy. Further to this, the rise of an increasingly militant wing within the unilateralist movement demonstrated that domestic subversive threats were beginning to diversify politically away from communist influence. Finally, the defence aspect of counter-subversion practice was removed entirely as a concern as Roger Hollis' suspicions regarding the futility of such actions was proven by the development of events during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

As a result of these realisations, subversion as a concept was defined less and less by its relation to communist activity. From 1963 onwards, domestic communism began to be regarded as less of a centrally defining feature of subversive activity and more as one manifestation of the threat amongst many others. Though domestic communists would continue to attract interest from Britain's intelligence apparatus for many years to come – indeed up to the fall of the Berlin wall – from 1963 onwards it ceased to capture high-level ministerial attention in the same way in which it had essentially since September 1945. With clear evidence that the CPGB was exhausted as both an immediate political and industrial threat, and that subversive dangers had diversified significantly – particularly since 1956 – subversive policy from the Wilson government onwards would



be far more diffuse in focus than during the Attlee years and era of Conservative hegemony.

## **Conclusion**

From the Attlee through the Macmillan governments, countering domestic communist subversion was considered to be a matter of paramount importance for British security policy. The longevity of official concern alone is striking, and demonstrates the severity that the threat of communist subversion was perceived to pose. Even in the face of well-organised and pervasive surveillance, tightened vetting procedures and a vast campaign of covert counter-propaganda, the problem succeeded in troubling the minds of ministers, civil servants and intelligence officers alike for the better part of twenty years. In immediate terms, concern regarding communist subversion served to directly affect the development of the post-war secret state. Moreover, as official understanding of the problem shifted to regarding domestic communism as an ideological as well as a security problem the matter served to impact upon a tremendously varied range of issues within wider British society. Whitehall's campaign of counter-subversion directly affected the conduct of industrial relations, understandings of political liberties and development of the broader domestic left. To conclude, three points remain to be summarised: the efficacy of counter-subversion policy over the period examined, the manner by which official understanding of the problem developed and the extent to which anti-communist measures can be regarded in hindsight as proportional.

## **Influence of Counter-Subversion Policy**

Whitehall's campaign of domestic counter-subversion during the early Cold War did not unilaterally secure the marginalisation of Britain's domestic communist movement. Anti-communist policy did, however, succeed admirably in two endeavours. Namely: mitigating the potential for subversion to develop into espionage, and establishing a system of comprehensive and unobtrusive surveillance. By the early 1950s, the domestic communist movement had ceased to function as a fruitful recruiting ground for Soviet intelligence as it had done in the inter-war period, and the creation of a covert, comprehensive and pervasive network of surveillance had been achieved with remarkable speed. Vetting measures were arguably the most successfully implemented element of counter-subversion policy. Reforms brought in – albeit reluctantly – under the Attlee government and strengthened by the Churchill administration succeeded in negating British communism's ability to pose a direct danger to the inner workings of the state. Whilst the system of negative vetting enacted in 1947 was exceptionally rudimentary by

modern security standards, its introduction and subsequent escalation via positive vetting procedure in 1951 did succeed in preventing direct access to official secrets by the Communist Party and its fellow travellers. Though vetting was not a fool proof bulwark against espionage – as is demonstrated by the great panoply of espionage scandals which have befallen the British state since 1951 – post-introduction there were no further major espionage cases with their origins in the domestic communist movement or Party. The introduction of and strengthening of vetting procedures effectively mitigated the likelihood of subversion developing into potentially far more damaging espionage activity.

Further to this, the introduction of a centralised system of vetting brought with it the long-term benefit of forcing the Security Service to create a system of comprehensive surveillance through which to monitor the activities of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Whilst the implementation and upkeep of such a system initially severely taxed the capabilities of the Service – rundown as it was by a depleted personnel complement and post-war budgetary constraints – its early success in both monitoring and cataloguing the activities of the CPGB meant that the formal element of the British communist movement was arguably removed as an immediate threat to state security as early as 1950 (the point at which Sillitoe stated to Attlee that MI5 possessed an almost complete list of CPGB membership).<sup>664</sup> Though it took the application of full half of MI5's resources to achieve this outcome, in the long run the benefits far outweighed the costs.<sup>665</sup> From the early 1950s onwards the government had access to a regular, comprehensive and timely stream of intelligence which fully exposed the aims and capabilities of the Communist Party of Great Britain. Such an asset was of immeasurable value, as it allowed accurate assessment of both the Party's strengths and weaknesses as well as gave indication as to where counter-actions should be targeted. The value of said surveillance was greatly assisted by the fact that the Party never appeared to fully comprehend the extent of the monitoring it was under. CPGB leadership appear to have suffered from a certain amount of cognitive dissonance in this regard. Certainly Party members were aware that they were a surveillance target for MI5, as evidenced by Peter Kerrigan's obfuscation on the matter of crypto-communist MPs in 1945,<sup>666</sup> John Gollan's rant regarding phone tapping

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<sup>664</sup> Sillitoe to meeting of GEN 183, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1950, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>665</sup> Brook Report, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17, p. 5

<sup>666</sup> Transcript of meeting of CPGB Political Committee overheard by MI5 eavesdropping device, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1945, TNA, KV 2/3812

in 1948,<sup>667</sup> and Peter Wright's testimony of the occasional bug being discovered at CPGB HQ.<sup>668</sup> Despite this loose awareness that the Party was a subject of interest, the extent of MI5's pervasion appears never to have been realised by the CPGB, thus meaning that the Party never made any significant effort to disguise or otherwise obfuscate discussion of its activities within its headquarters premises. As such, MI5 had access to a stream of accurate information regarding the CPGB's intent and capabilities.

Official policy failed, however, to unilaterally secure domestic communism's marginalisation. Though official efforts ensured that communist influence remained contained within small pockets of society, it was the British communist movement's own poor leadership and lack of imagination which ultimately undermined its relevance, rather than any Whitehall initiative. The CPGB's consistent adherence to Kremlin diktat limited the Party's popularity and ensured that when proof of Soviet brutality arrived the repercussions for the movement were considerably graver than they might have been otherwise. It was Harry Pollitt and John Gollan's ineptitude in handling the successive crises of 1956 which resulted in mass-desertion from the Communist Party, rather than any particular action on the part of the government. The Party's failure to resolve political differences at its 25<sup>th</sup> Congress in February 1957 ensured the flight of its intellectual wing, not any particular action on the part of officialdom. Equally, the genesis of the New Left was an entirely organic process, initially predicated on dissatisfaction with Moscow's hypocrisy following Khrushchev's speech to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPSU. Savile and Thompson's decision to publish the *Reasoner* was not caused by any governmental anti-communist initiative, but was instead a direct reaction to Soviet communism's failure to provide a moral alternative to capitalism.<sup>669</sup> Official attempts to counter influential communists within academia during the early part of the 1950s were characterised by amateurism and lack of clear intent and it seems unlikely that official action would have been able to artificially engineer the sort of schism which occurred naturally as a result of poor leadership and Soviet hypocrisy. As such, wider events beyond the control of Whitehall can be said to have played a highly significant role in the

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<sup>667</sup> 'They open our letters. They go to our meetings... The spies are everywhere!' Transcript of conversation overheard by MI5 eavesdropping device, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1948, TNA, KV 2/1777

<sup>668</sup> A microphone installed in an outside coal chute was undermined when a CPGB official stumbled across its frequency whilst tuning his radio set, causing a loud feedback loop and hurried retrieval of the microphone by MI5 (the physical device itself was not located by the CPGB). Peter Wright, *Spycatcher*, (Viking Penguin, London, 1987) p. 57

<sup>669</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Reply to George Matthews', *The Reasoner*, Issue 1, July 1956, p. 15

decline of British communism's influence. In contrast to the more defensive elements of counter-subversion policy, the government's attempts to marginalise and undermine domestic communism within wider British society typically produced more mixed results. This was perhaps inevitable. Whitehall had full control over defensive policy and could manage it absolutely. The success of offensive policy, however, was in large part contingent upon convincing private groups and individuals of the government's viewpoint, whilst co-opting these same elements to repress communist influence in areas which officialdom was unable to directly intervene.

This approach produced uneven results, as was proven by the counter-subversion experience in the unions. Despite IRD focusing upon communism in industry as a matter of priority essentially from the formation of the English Section in 1951,<sup>670</sup> progress during the early part of the 1950s was slow. Meanwhile, early counter-propaganda efforts seem mostly to have been effective only in those industrial sectors already predisposed to an anti-communist world-view. It follows that IRD's early successes were nearly universally a product of preaching to the converted. The sectors of engineering, shipbuilding, vehicle building and construction all proved resilient to the Department's overtures – which, by its own admission, was where the vast majority of communist influence was concentrated.<sup>671</sup> Offensive efforts in the unions were in effect hamstrung. On the one hand, attempting to inform unionists of the dangers of communist influence in order to artificially manufacture anti-communist sentiment produced only limited results. On the other, Whitehall recognised that it could not interfere directly in industrial affairs: 'the only action we could take was to keep up the pressure on them (communists) through publicity'.<sup>672</sup> It was only once the Security Service obtained information which proved that communists in the Electrical Trades Union had falsified electoral results that any notable headway against industrial communism was made. In retrospect, the decision by Frank Foulkes and Frank Haxell to rig the ballot against Leslie Cannon in 1956 was a strategic error of the highest magnitude. Though in the short term the exclusion of Cannon meant that the Communist Party retained its influence within the ETU, the longer term consequence was that Whitehall was granted a desperately needed chink in industrial communism's armour. Had evidence of ETU ballot-rigging not emerged it is difficult to

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<sup>670</sup> Minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the AC (H), 22<sup>nd</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>671</sup> 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department', 15<sup>th</sup> March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

<sup>672</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1958, TNA, CAB 134/1344

see how the government's strategy would have meaningfully undermined communist influence in industry. For counter-propaganda efforts in the unions to succeed, it had to be proved that communists were actively seeking to subvert the trade unions for their own ends. It is clear that, unlike Whitehall, many rank and file trade unionists did not instinctively consider communism to be a threat. Anti-communist propaganda was effective therefore only when outright proof of communist skulduggery could be obtained. IRD proved incapable of unilaterally generating viable anti-communist material. However, as a result of the comprehensive intelligence available via MI5's surveillance network, the state was able to exploit communist weakness effectively whenever it presented itself. Once sufficiently damaging material was obtained, IRD's domestic propaganda network, from 1954 onwards,<sup>673</sup> did prove effective at disseminating material across a wide range of outlets. When proof of communist malpractice was obtained, the government had the tools available to ensure that the issue was kept in the public eye, which thereby facilitated a slow but steady turn of popular opinion firmly against domestic communism. Even Whitehall's offensive measures were therefore to a certain extent reactive – when the full extent of IRD English Section's contacts across the media were utilised, official material could have a staggeringly influential impact. However, the quality of information provided had to be sufficiently damaging and grounded in immediate fact to ensure that it would attract meaningful attention. In effect, a single BBC *Panorama* documentary about ballot rigging in the ETU accompanied by regular newspaper editorials on the subject accomplished exponentially more than the publication of endless tracts of anti-communist polemic had done over the previous eight years. Offensive counter-subversion efforts could be highly effective, but their success was contingent upon the acquisition of suitably damaging material with which to undermine communism's credibility as a benign political philosophy.

As such, domestic counter-subversion policy during the early Cold War succeeded in protecting the State, but was not ultimately responsible for British communism's broader decline. Security policy played no role in effecting the Communist Party's electoral collapse in 1950 and '51, nor did it affect the ideology's collapse in support following the events of 1956. British communism's decline ultimately came about as a result of internal pressures, rather than official action. Government intervention was eventually responsible

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<sup>673</sup> As indicated by 'Progress Report on the Work of the English Section of the Information Research Department of the Foreign Office', IRD memorandum as circulated to the AC (H), 15<sup>th</sup> March 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

to a significant degree for communism's marginalisation within the trade union movement. Again however, the conditions which made this possible were generated by the communist movement itself. The government capitalised on proof of communist dishonesty as provided by the ETU ballot-rigging scandal, it did not artificially manufacture anti-communist sympathy through independent counter-propaganda efforts. Early Cold War counter-subversive policy proved effective from a defensive standpoint, and did effectively diminish the communist movement's usefulness as a tool of Soviet espionage. British communism's broader decline, however, was more the result of extra-governmental factors.

### **Longevity and Changing Official Understanding**

In large part domestic communism continued to be viewed as a grave threat by successive governments as a result of changing understandings of the nature of the problem. It seems clear that communism initially became viewed as a central threat to domestic security due to perceived links between subversive activity and Soviet espionage. Notably, the Gouzenko affair was in large part defined by its subversive component. The findings of the Canadian Royal Commission on the Gouzenko affair, published in 1946, stated outright that 'the Communist movement was the principal base within which the espionage network was recruited'.<sup>674</sup> That this conclusion had a significant impact upon official thinking in Britain is proved by the opening notes from the initial meeting of GEN 183 'The report of the Working Party reviewed the report of the Royal Commission... It concluded that most, if not all of the conditions in which the Canadian ring operated existed in this country.'<sup>675</sup> Of course, Attlee himself entered office already wary of the potential dangers posed by domestic communism – as evidenced by his early meetings with the DG and DDG of MI5.<sup>676</sup> Though a portion of Attlee's concern was most likely party-political, it seems clear that the presence of crypto-communist MPs in the PLP was a problem ultimately due to national security implications. As evidenced by Attlee's efforts to conceal discussions regarding atomic weapons development even from

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<sup>674</sup> *The Report of the Royal Commission Appointed under Order in Council P.C. 411 of February 5, 1946 to Investigate the Facts Relating to and the Circumstances Surrounding the Communication, by Public Officials and Other Persons in Positions of Trust of Secret and Confidential Information to Agents of a Foreign Power*, Canadian Privy Council, June 1946, p.44 – accessed online via: <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/472640/publication.html>

<sup>675</sup> Minutes of 1<sup>st</sup> meeting of GEN 183, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>676</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 324

his own Cabinet, the Prime Minister was aware of the fact that official secrecy was of paramount importance to post-war British interests. The presence of crypto-communist MPs had the potential to fundamentally compromise wider national security efforts.

Gouzenko and crypto-communist concerns therefore propelled communist subversion from being regarded as a mere tangential concern to an issue at the heart of national security deliberations. The Gouzenko affair in particular served to shape initial understandings of the nature of the subversive threat. As put by Norman Brook communist 'ideas evidently have a strong appeal to a certain type of intellectual; and scientists and artists, in particular, seem to be especially susceptible to them'.<sup>677</sup>

Communist subversives were understood as the main potential pool for Soviet agent recruitment, hence the early focus upon a defensive strategy. It is telling that the first counter-subversive measures actively pursued – namely the introduction of negative vetting in 1947 and attempted creation of a treachery bill in 1950 – were explicitly designed to protect the state against communist incursion. Meanwhile, the Security Service's creation of a comprehensive network of surveillance can also be understood to have been initially intended as a protective measure. In order for the provisions of negative vetting to work as intended, the Service required accurate information on who was directly or indirectly connected to the Communist Party. The bugging of King Street and execution of operations such as STILL LIFE were intended to provide the Service with comprehensive and timely information regarding the makeup of the CPGB's membership. These were not measures intended to undermine the influence of, or otherwise 'harass' the Communist Party, as was made abundantly clear by the AC (M) in late 1949: 'so long as the Communist Party remained a legal political organisation it was considered that it would hardly be proper for the Government in power to use Government funds and Government agencies for the purposes of discrediting it'.<sup>678</sup> The Labour Cabinet was not willing to countenance offensive action against the CPGB during the initial years of Whitehall's counter-communist campaign. It was believed during the first five years of the Attlee government that communist subversion was a matter which could be solved solely through the enactment of more thorough protective security measures.

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<sup>677</sup> Brook Report, March 1951, p. 6, TNA, CAB 301/17

<sup>678</sup> Response by the AC (M) to the AC (O) on the latter's report entitled 'Possible Anti-Communist Activities at Home', 19<sup>th</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 1/343



Meanwhile, whilst Gouzenko raised the matter, domestic communism's central place in the Whitehall panoply of security concerns was added to by the publication of the JIC report 'The Communist Party as a Fifth Column in the Event of War with Russia' in December 1946. The report concluded that the Communist Party inside the United Kingdom was 'sufficiently well organised to be in a position to cause considerable dislocation of our war effort'.<sup>679</sup> There was therefore an additional facet to initial concern. Namely that a strong domestic presence could prove a significant hindrance in case of transition to war with the Soviet Union. Events in the wider world indicated that such a conclusion was correct in its assumption. The steady Soviet assimilation of Eastern Europe in the years after the war proved that communist subversion could significantly interfere in the actions of the sovereign government, and in a worst case scenario lead to the total takeover of a country. Foreign Office reports from the early 1950s made consistent reference to the belief that Soviet policy hinged upon the encouragement of civil disorder, which would hopefully lead to a communist coup, demonstrating that this assessment was not a fleeting one.<sup>680</sup> Similarly, deliberations regarding the mass internment of communists demonstrate that such fears were deemed credible enough that the government were prepared to attempt to disrupt the communist movement with outright force should war have come.<sup>681</sup> However, similar plans from 1959 also show a significant reduction in the planned number of internees – demonstrating that there was a cooling of official concern as the decade wore on. Fears that communists could wreak significant havoc persisted within certain quarters of Whitehall – subversive activity still played such a major part in defence planners' war-games even in 1968, showing that the military continued to regard such an eventuality as a realistic concern.<sup>682</sup> However, for the Security Service and those on the AC (H) tasked with the explicit study of domestic communism, disruption in the case of war was at most a peripheral concern for the most part. Beyond brief liaison with the Cabinet Defence Committee in 1952, the impact of domestic communism on defence planning played little part in assessments of the movement's strengths by the AC (H). Meanwhile, when the Security Service were asked explicitly to comment upon the likelihood of domestic communist disruption in 1968, the

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<sup>679</sup> 'The Communist Party as a Fifth Column in the Event of War with Russia', JIC Report, December 1946, TNA, CAB 81/133

<sup>680</sup> 'Countering Communism', memorandum by the Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>681</sup> 'Policy RE The Setting up of Detention & Internment Camps in the UK for the Detention of British Subjects & the Internment of Aliens in the Event of Emergency, 1948-1954', TNA, KV 4/245

<sup>682</sup> Peter Hennessy, *The Secret State*, (Penguin, London, 2010), pp. 206-207

Service's view was considerably less worried than that held by counterparts in the Defence Staff. Ergo, it can be assumed that though the implications of domestic communism upon defence planning were taken into account at least initially – this aspect of the threat was not considered so pressing as to keep the problem central to cabinet-level concerns for as long as it was. The defence aspect of the problem was more of a tangential issue, fretted over by the Armed Forces, but not a central concern for those explicitly tasked with the formulation and enactment of counter-subversive policy.

In theory therefore, official worry regarding the domestic communist movement should have declined rapidly as of the early 1950s, had fears been predicated solely upon the espionage and defence aspects of the issue. As has been previously discussed, MI5 experienced an extraordinarily high degree of success in its efforts to place the CPGB under comprehensive surveillance. By April 1950 Percy Sillitoe was able to state outright to the PM that the Service had 'an almost complete list of the membership of the Communist Party of Great Britain with particulars of age, sex and employment'.<sup>683</sup> Therefore, it follows that fears regarding the Communist Party as a source of Soviet espionage should have dissipated rapidly, leading to a corresponding decrease in concern regarding domestic communist activity as a whole. Despite this however, communism remained central to the government's domestic security concerns, with measures being if anything intensified in the early 1950s, with the introduction of positive vetting, creation of the AC (H) and granting of domestic remit to IRD all occurring over the course of 1951. Initially at least, this was due in part to over-estimation by the government of domestic communism's strengths. Despite the fact that in hindsight it can be seen that the Security Service's early success in achieving near-complete surveillance coverage had essentially removed the Communist Party as a covert threat by 1950, it is clear that officials continuously felt that they were missing some crucial piece of the puzzle. Norman Brook's 1951 report on the state of British intelligence included the judgement that 'the crypto-Communists, fellow-travellers and intellectual-Marxists represent as least as great a danger as the actual Communist Party... There is here an undoubted gap in our knowledge of potential agents for the Russian intelligence service or of people who might be willing, and able, to convey useful information to the Russians.'<sup>684</sup> A steady stream of espionage cases involving individuals who justified their behaviour on ideological

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<sup>683</sup> Sillitoe to meeting of GEN 183, 5<sup>th</sup> April 1950, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>684</sup> Report of Enquiry by Sir Norman Brook into the Secret Intelligence and Security Services, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17, p. 6

grounds – Fuchs, Burgess and Maclean amongst them – helped to give this narrative a longevity it might have otherwise lacked. Beyond this however, it can be seen that the centrality of the domestic communist threat persisted in large part as a result of a shift in Whitehall’s understanding at the turn of the decade. Foreign Office analysis dating from June 1951 judged that ‘Communist parties... are to work upon the masses through what Stalin calls “transmission belts” or “levers”... to create in the popular mind misgivings about policy contrary to that of the Soviet Union’.<sup>685</sup> The communist threat moved therefore from being understood as a covert threat to the state, to one which was dangerous more for its influence upon wider society.

As communists were deemed ultimately to be potential tools of Soviet foreign policy – which aimed, in the view of the FO, to achieve ‘world domination’<sup>686</sup> – allowing the ideology to gain influence within British society was obviously highly undesirable. Focus therefore shifted from guarding against individual acts of espionage to attempting to undermine communism’s wider influence. Ergo, the move to begin monitoring those employed within academia and the teaching professions who would, according to this theory, be able to exercise their influence to ensure the spread of communist ideas amongst a new generation of young men and women. The AC (H) did not attempt to create fledgling state-private counter-communist networks via trusted colleagues in academia in order to guard government secrets against Soviet predations. Nor did the Security Service take an interest in the likes of Christopher Hill, Maurice Dobb and Eric Hobsbawm et al because they were worried that a group of radical left-wing economists and historians might be ferrying nuclear information to KGB handlers tucked in the sleeves of their gowns. Rather these actions were intended to garner information about the scale of communist influence in broader British society whilst seeking ways to marginalise that influence in the most discreet way possible. Official concern regarding domestic communism was thus perpetuated by the judgement that the movement possessed the real capability to adversely affect opinion across wider British society, not merely threaten official security directly.

Out of all the areas of British society deemed in 1951 to be at risk of undue communist influence, it was industry which served to keep communism at the centre of concerns

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<sup>685</sup> ‘Countering Communism’ Annexe A – Memorandum by the Foreign Office, 7<sup>th</sup> June 1951, TNA, CAB 134/737

<sup>686</sup> Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Permanent Under-Secretary’s Committee, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1949, TNA, FO 1093/576

until the early 1960s. Fears regarding the more highbrow aspects of communism dissipated as a result of the CPGB's inner turmoil post-1956. As a result of MI5 monitoring, as well as IRD's regular updates from overt sources, both ministers and senior Civil servants alike were well aware that the mass-exodus from the Party post-Hungary was proof of communism's collapse amongst its adherents within the intelligentsia. Had official worry been predicated solely on academia and education as communist 'transmission belts' it is likely that domestic communist threat would have been downgraded at this juncture. The collapse of communism's appeal in intellectual circles was not replicated in the unions however: 'the reaction of the trade union wing to the Stalin issue was one of bewilderment rather than resentment'.<sup>687</sup> As it was, the CPGB's retention of influence within the unions combined with the failure of officialdom to make significant headway against the problem essentially until 1961 meant that the movement retained its status as a central threat well into the Macmillan government. The primary worry was that the Communist Party was slowly infiltrating trade union leadership in order to co-opt the Labour movement into a vehicle for its own ideological designs. Despite the Party's small size, political apathy within the unions meant that it was able, via its organisational prowess, to exploit low turn-out and secure key seats on a number of union executives. Therefore, despite possessing only marginal representation in industry – 0.3% of the total industrial workforce as of 1954 – the Communist Party was able to wield a disproportionate influence over the trajectory of industrial politics.<sup>688</sup> Here the perpetuation of Whitehall's concern is fairly straightforward to understand. Though it identified the problem of communist influence over trade union executive councils as early as the 1940s, strategies to combat this achieved little success until the discovery of electoral fraud in the ETU elections. There is little evidence to suggest that IRD's efforts ever succeeded in altering trade unionist apathy or significantly increasing turnout for industrial elections. Moreover, without direct proof of foul play, official counter-propaganda efforts were unable to convince trade unionists that communism was an inherently negative influence. As stated by Norman Brook: 'the majority of the rank and file would not be prejudiced against a leader merely because he was a Communist, so long as he gave proof of effective leadership'.<sup>689</sup> It was only due to communist

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<sup>687</sup> 'The British Communist Party's Reaction to the Growth of Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', Note by the Security Service to the AC (H), 1<sup>st</sup> August 1957, TNA, CAB 134/1342

<sup>688</sup> 'Communist Penetration of Trades Unions', Foreign Office paper as circulated to the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> September 1954, TNA, CAB 134/739

<sup>689</sup> Comments of Sir Norman Brook to meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> April 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

malpractice within the Electrical Trades Union that the government was able to wear away at communist industrial influence. Even with this information to hand however, undoing communist infiltration of the unions was a slow process. Whitehall was unable to act directly against the ETU, whilst MI5's information regarding the fraud was difficult to exploit owing to the sensitivity of its provenance. Though information regarding ballot rigging first emerged in mid-1956,<sup>690</sup> the process of turning public opinion against the union's executive still took another five years due to these reasons. Even where information was forthcoming, the process of altering wider opinion was ultimately a slow, onerous process.

That the underlying theory upon which official concern was predicated was logical is demonstrated by the events of the 1960 Labour Party and TUC conferences. By leveraging its influence within the ETU and AEU, the CPGB was able to support the passage of pro-unilateralist votes at both conferences, directly against the wishes of both PLP leadership and the government itself. Though the following year the Party was unable to replicate the same feat due to its loss of control over the AEU,<sup>691</sup> the implication here is plain. Even control over a small group of key unions gave the CPGB a degree of influence disproportionate to its size. By leveraging the ETU and AEU the Party was able to make a significant nuisance of itself. Had the Communist Party succeeded in capturing a wider range of union executives it could theoretically have exercised significant power over the direction of the wider Labour movement. Therefore, influence within the unions for a time gave the Party a continued political relevancy which it would otherwise have lacked. The Party was never an electoral force, its ability to act covertly was undermined as a result of Security Service monitoring and its relevance to the trajectory of wider radical politics was marginalised as a result of Hungary. Continued control over union executives therefore allowed the communist movement to retain a level of importance which would otherwise have been impossible – in the process ensuring that official attention remained trained on the issue of domestic communism for a far longer period than would otherwise have been the case.

The genesis and perpetuation of official concern regarding domestic communism was therefore the product of a shifting understanding of the nature of the threat. Conclusions

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<sup>690</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the AC (H), 13<sup>th</sup> July 1956, TNA, CAB 134/1194

<sup>691</sup> 'Communist Industrial Activity', Paper by the Security Service, 4<sup>th</sup> December 1962, TNA, CAB 134/1347, also 'Communism in the United Kingdom', Memorandum by the Security Service, 24<sup>th</sup> November 1961, TNA CAB 134/1346

drawn on the basis of espionage cases in the late 1940s, which indicated that communist subversive networks offered fertile recruiting ground for Soviet intelligence, first raised the domestic communism to a position of central importance. As a result, the government responded with significant reform and escalation of vetting procedure and via MI5 began a pervasive campaign of surveillance against the CPGB. These actions essentially negated communism's immediate threat to state security. However, by the time this was achieved official understanding of the problem had become equally concerned with communist influence within wider society, which necessitated the creation of more offensive machinery and the formalisation of IRD's domestic anti-communist propaganda campaign. Official attention was then held by the intransigence of communist influence in the unions – which proved remarkably resilient to official counter-measures and only really started to be undone once firm proof of malicious activity was obtained. British communism's marginal electoral appeal and limited direct political clout was ultimately irrelevant to Whitehall's calculations. It was always self-evident that the Party possessed little capability to impinge directly upon political stability. Even had the CPGB's acquisition of two MPs at the 1945 General Election caused official concern – of which there is little evidence – the fact that the Party was wiped from the face of the electoral map in 1950 definitively proved at an early stage that British communism's strength was not mass political appeal. In this sense the CPGB very different from its counterparts on the continent.<sup>692</sup> Indeed, perhaps counter-intuitively, the political dynamic of the CPGB was the aspect that Whitehall was most at ease with. At the very least it was felt that the Party's status as a legal political group kept it honest and removed the temptation to go underground where it might have been more difficult to monitor.<sup>693</sup> Official understanding of domestic communism evolved over time – with the consequence that whenever one facet of the problem was solved, there was always another to take its place. Various aspects were solved steadily over time, however, this process still took the better part of twenty years before all the component parts of the problem were sufficiently resolved to ensure that the domestic communist problem had been firmly marginalised.

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<sup>692</sup> The French Communist Party achieved 26% of the vote in the 1945 French general election and 28.6% in 1946. The Italian Communist Party meanwhile had some 2 million members by the end of 1946. Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, (HarperCollins, London, 1997), pp. 102-103

<sup>693</sup> 'The CPGB's Clandestine Activities and Security Measures', Section of 'Communism in the United Kingdom and Counter-measures', MI5 report, March 1961, TNA, CAB, 134/1346

## **Politicisation**

A final question remains. Did the enactment of anti-communist measures during the Cold War represent a politicisation of security policy? Judging by the weight of available evidence it would seem overwhelmingly that Whitehall consistently at least attempted to ensure that all domestic counter-communist action remained predicated on national security, rather than political, concerns. It is important to remember that communists had, in effect, pronounced their ideological loyalty to a foreign power whose interests were diametrically opposed to the continued security and stability of the United Kingdom. When communists acted upon their political loyalties, the results for British security could be catastrophic. For instance, via atomic espionage efforts, the actions of ideologically motivated British communists actively assisted the Soviet Union in becoming an existential threat to the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, by its own admission, the CPGB sought actively via industrial and political activities to overthrow British parliamentary democracy.<sup>694</sup> The communist world-view was hostile to continued governmental stability and there was sufficient evidence throughout 1945-1964 that showed that domestic communists were actively working to act upon this impulse. Domestic communism did pose a genuine threat to British stability during the early years of the Cold War.

Official response could still have been politically motivated however. Fortunately, this was not the case. From the evidence available it can be seen that official policy was typically formulated around justifiable security concerns. Much of the credit for this can be attributed to the precedent established by the Attlee government combined with the resolutely apolitical culture of the Security Service. Counter-communist measures were adopted only with the utmost reluctance by the Attlee administration. Though in hindsight many of the arguments which slowed the initial adoption of vetting and subsequent escalation of counter-subversion were predicated ultimately on a certain naivety regarding the intentions of the communist movement, early restraint did establish a principle of moderation. Vetting was adopted only as a last resort: 'this is not to say that all Communists would be prepared, even after long exposure to Communist indoctrination, to betray their country by consenting to work for Russian espionage agents; but there is

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<sup>694</sup> *The British Road to Socialism*, 1951 version, Communist Party of Great Britain Archive, CP/CENT/COMM/01/01

no way of separating the sheep from the goats'.<sup>695</sup> In light of Attlee's knowledge of considerable penetration of the PLP by crypto-communists, that the PM resisted the urge for reactionary reprisal is testament to his firm belief in measured response. Despite outcry from certain hard left MPs on the public announcement of vetting procedure,<sup>696</sup> it is clear that the introduction of negative vetting was motivated solely by justifiable national security concerns and not out of political spite or reactionary tendency. The Gouzenko affair made it clear that Western governments were far more vulnerable to the predations of Soviet espionage than had been previously assumed, ergo the Attlee administration's attempts to increase security were a wholly responsible act in light of the available evidence. Further to this, the judgement of the AC (M) that the Communist Party was to retain its status as a legal political entity was an important one, as it necessarily limited the range of options which could be taken against the Party (often to the regular frustration of successive Home Secretaries and Attorney Generals). As such, future counter-subversion policy had to be designed around the precedent that outright repressive force was an unviable option when seeking to mitigate the CPGB's wider influence. The final long-term contribution of the Attlee government was of course the appointment of Norman Brook to the position of Cabinet Secretary. Those qualities of stability, calmness, and administrative skill which Brook brought to the role ensured that British counter-subversion policy was consistently moderate in its formulation and execution.<sup>697</sup>

The Security Service itself also acted as a check on politicisation. MI5's insistence on involving itself in matters only in matters of national security helped to avoid the occurrence of a politically motivated witch-hunt. As stated by Guy Liddell to Clement Attlee in 1946: 'it had always been the policy of our office to keep entirely clear of politics'.<sup>698</sup> That this principle remained a guiding part of the Service's ethos is shown by Graham Mitchell's reply to Patrick Gordon Walker when PLP leadership asked MI5 to investigate communist entryists in the early '60s: 'it was incumbent on the Security Service to be very careful to do nothing which could be represented as partaking of a

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<sup>695</sup> 'The Employment of Civil Servants, etc. exposed to Communist influence', Working Party of the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1947 TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>696</sup> Response by the AC (M) to the AC (O) on the latter's report entitled 'Possible Anti-Communist Activities at Home', 19<sup>th</sup> December 1949, TNA, CAB 1/343

<sup>697</sup> For testament to Brook's character see entry in *ODNB*, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32089?docPos=1>

<sup>698</sup> Serial 315a, Guy Liddell recalling conversation with Frederick Bellenger, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1946, TNA, KV 2/3812



party political nature'.<sup>699</sup> Of course, the Service's moderation was also in part motivated by practical considerations. Early discussion of vetting makes it clear that MI5 resisted its introduction primarily due to fears that it would be swamped by investigatory work.<sup>700</sup> Given that by 1951 a full 50% of the Service was dedicated to communist related work,<sup>701</sup> this would seem to have been a valid fear. Had the demands on MI5 been any greater it seems unlikely that its capabilities would have been stretched to breaking point. It follows that even had overt repression of the communist movement been countenanced, the state would have lacked the necessary resources to carry it out. Beyond this, the most important contribution of the Security Service to ensuring proportional response was its extensive network of surveillance which surreptitiously monitored CPGB and wider communist activities from the late '40s onwards. On the face of it this may seem counter-intuitive – the Service's monitoring efforts, though fully legal, could be interpreted as the mass invasion of personal privacy and political liberty by the state. However, Security Service surveillance in actuality served to ensure that official measures stayed within reasonable boundaries. Due to the fact that ministers had a regular, accurate and timely source of intelligence regarding communist activities, undue paranoia was for the most part avoided. MI5's surveillance of the Party had an actively calming influence upon counter-subversive policy. Incorrect presumptions – for example Anthony Eden's insistence that communist strategy in the unions was to stir up strike action wherever possible – were able to be quickly discounted due to MI5's direct access to high level CPGB discussions. Service monitoring meant that the government was able to establish the exact boundaries of domestic communism's capabilities and intent and adjust the severity of counter-measures accordingly. There was no 'red scare' in Britain during the 1950s in large part because MI5 were able to confidently identify circa 90% of British communists from the very beginning of the decade. Equally importantly, evidence available suggests that MI5's surveillance of British communism was wholly professional in character. What Kim Philby termed 'an air of professional competence which [SIS] never matched'<sup>702</sup> carried over into the Service's anti-communist work. Security Service monitoring was typically unobtrusive in character. Those under surveillance were usually never aware that they were being observed by the state, whilst intelligence was only acted

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<sup>699</sup> Note by Graham Mitchell recalling meeting with Gordon Walker, 5<sup>th</sup> September 1961, as cited in Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 413

<sup>700</sup> Comments of Sir Percy Sillitoe to meeting of GEN 183, 16<sup>th</sup> June 1947, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>701</sup> Brook Report, 1951, TNA, CAB 301/17, p. 5

<sup>702</sup> Kim Philby, *My Silent War*, (Panther Books, London, 1983), p.90

upon if there was genuine evidence of wrongdoing. The purpose of MI5 surveillance was passive observation – not active repression. The Service was not actively looking for excuses for repression, but rather were monitoring the situation so that the threat domestic communism posed could be better understood and deescalated as calmly as possible.

As such, there was little official appetite for mass repression of communists of the type which defined the American response over the same period. Indeed at points, counter-subversive policy seems to have been designed to deliberately avoid the American model. For example, positive vetting was initially resisted on the proviso that ‘the FBI system is extremely elaborate... [The subject] has to fill in a detailed and lengthy form listing his ancestry and the whole of career, education etc. We consider that any such procedure would be repugnant to British thinking’.<sup>703</sup> Moreover, it could be argued that because anti-communist hysteria in the United States became so virulent during the early Cold War, Whitehall had the benefit of watching from afar the perfect model to avoid. As a result of these various factors – a conscious decision on the part of the Attlee government to strive for impartiality, MI5’s apolitical corporate culture, and an immediate counter-example provided by the American experience - Whitehall counter-subversion policy remained grounded largely within national security concerns.

## **Summary**

To conclude, knowledge of the development of British domestic anti-communist policy between the years of 1945 and 1964 adds considerably to broader understandings of post-war British history. As has been shown, domestic communism worried the British government greatly during the early years of the Cold War. Such concerns helped to actively shape the structure of the modern state as well as inform the development of industrial relations and indeed the wider Labour movement itself. Analysis of counter-subversion policy over the period proves the still consistently overlooked importance of secret intelligence to the Attlee government in particular and also helps to demonstrate that whilst historians may argue over use of the term in other areas, ‘post-war consensus’ was very much a reality with regards to the development of security policy.<sup>704</sup> The degree to which the second Churchill government fully accepted – and indeed embraced – the

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<sup>703</sup> ‘Committee on Positive Vetting Report’, 27<sup>th</sup> October 1950, as circulated to the Cabinet Committee on Subversive Activities, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1950, TNA, CAB 130/20

<sup>704</sup> See, *The Myth of Consensus*, ed. Harriet Jones & Michael D. Kandiah, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1996); also ‘Is the “Post-war Consensus” a Myth?’, Ben Pimlott, Dennis Kavanagh & Peter Morris, *Contemporary Record*, Vol. 2, Issue 6, 1989

Labour's conclusions regarding domestic security is striking. Equally, study of domestic counter-subversive policy shows that whilst senior figures within Whitehall were actively concerned by communist influence during the early Cold War period, adherence to traditional principles of political liberty and the independence of the Labour movement remained of consistent importance to policy-makers. Personal political convictions were tolerated so long as they did not actively pose a danger to the continued security and stability of the United Kingdom, the machinery of state security was not exploited to undermine the British left nor impinge upon its traditional independence except in cases where radical elements demonstrated a willingness to undermine British security in favour of a foreign power. The development of domestic anti-communist policy in Britain during the early Cold War provides an admirable example of how to conduct a counter-subversive campaign within a liberal democracy without fundamentally undermining democratic rights and freedoms.

There remains, as ever, scope for further research on this topic. Whilst the vast majority of archival material regarding the subject has now been released, there are other factors not assessed in this thesis which remain to be explored. Most notably, it is clear that considerable parallels existed between the British and American national experiences on this subject. A comprehensive survey of the commonalities and differences between the two would be of particular historical benefit, as would an assessment as to what extent British and American reaction was governed by transnational forces occurring within the broader western/NATO alliance. An attempt was made to explore these questions during the course of researching this thesis, however a four month research trip to the US National Archives and Midwestern Presidential Libraries produced only frustration. There is evidence that the necessary archival material required to comment authoritatively upon these issues does exist within the US archives. However the sheer volume of material stored in US facilities, combined with these institutions' relatively inefficient working practices, means that a far greater length of time would be required for research than was available over the course of this project.

As regards the contemporary relevance of this thesis, though 'subversion' as a term has fallen from the current governmental lexicon essentially for political reasons, (the term was not included in the 1989 Security Service Act, whilst MI5 obtained formal permission to stop the routine monitoring of members of subversive organisations in

1992),<sup>705</sup> it is clear that in practice subversive concerns are still of importance. The rise of Islamic extremism in particular demonstrates that ideological threats to Britain are still a real and pressing danger. Indeed, such ideological threats are arguably even more dangerous than those faced in the early Cold War period due to the inherently violent nature of extremism. Contemporary threats show that an understanding of counter-subversive policy is important even beyond an abstract academic sense. It is interesting to note the parallels between current events and historical practice - the establishment of the Home Office Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) in 2007 in particular appears to have been created to fulfil a very similar role to that once managed by IRD. Meanwhile, recent actions by the Russian government to create UK-based quasi-front organisations shows that the threat of state-sponsored subversive activity remains a real and present challenge to British stability.<sup>706</sup> A thorough understanding of counter-subversive policy in historical context is thus of continuing importance for historians and government officials alike.

This thesis, with its focus upon the development of British domestic counter-subversion policy between 1945 and 1964, has hopefully demonstrated the broader significance of Whitehall's counter-communist campaign as a vital component of post-war British political history. Counter-communist security policy both shaped, and was shaped by, wider British political culture. Analysis of counter-subversive policy in the early Cold War period serves to illustrate shifting official understandings of communism as both a threat and ideology. It also serves to illustrate how Whitehall understood the relationship between State and citizenry in post-war era in the face of an ideologically-based threat to stability and security. In this way, it is hoped that this thesis has made an original and timely contribution to the broader corpus of Cold War historiography.

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<sup>705</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 844

<sup>706</sup> 'Putin Wages Propaganda War on UK', *The Times*, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2016

## **Appendix: Suspected Crypto-Communist MPs**

Labour Members Included on Morgan Phillips List of ‘Lost Sheep’ MPs: 1945 Intake (in order of Phillips’ listing)<sup>707</sup>:

- **John Mack (Newcastle-under-Lyme)**

MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme from 1942 to 1951. Stood down at the 1951 general election. Member of Liverpool City Council 1928 to 1946. Mack was of Jewish heritage and was a strong advocate for Jewish rights. Member of Poale-Zion,<sup>708</sup> which may explain his inclusion on the list. Agitated strongly during the war for greater protection of European Jewry. Became Vice-President of the Committee for a Jewish Army in 1943 and was influential in the creation of the Jewish Brigade (British Army group formed of Palestinian Mandate Jews, saw combat in Italy during spring 1945).<sup>709</sup> Travelled to Romania and Bulgaria in 1946 to attempt to improve conditions for Balkan Jewish communities. No available evidence suggests substantive investigation of Mack’s activities by either MI5 or the PLP post-1945.<sup>710</sup>

- **Sydney Silverman (Nelson and Colne)**

MP for Nelson and Colne from 1935 to 1968. Conscientious objector during the First World War, served three prison sentences at Preston, Wormwood Scrubs and Belfast prisons. Taught English at the University of Helsinki 1921 to 1925.<sup>711</sup> Of Jewish heritage. Lifelong pacifist, though supported British entry into the Second World War on account of Nazi Germany’s rampant anti-Semitism. Sympathetic to the Soviet Union, but no available evidence suggests communist loyalties.<sup>712</sup>

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<sup>707</sup> See ‘Lost Sheep’ file, Morgan Phillips, General Secretary’s papers, Labour Party Archive, LP/GS/LS, National Museum of Labour History, Manchester

<sup>708</sup> Initially a movement of Marxist-Zionist Jewish workers, with various branches based around the world. The British branch was more right-wing than many of its fellows and has succeeded in maintaining its affiliation with the Labour Party up until the present day (known as the Jewish Labour Movement since 2004).

<sup>709</sup> *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, ed. W. Rubenstein & Michael A. Jolles, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011), p. 633

<sup>710</sup> Ibid.

<sup>711</sup> ‘Sydney Silverman’, *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/36093?docPos=1>

<sup>712</sup> Silverman’s personal view on Anglo-Soviet relations is well summed up by: Sydney Silverman, ‘Socialist-Communist Relations II’, *The Labour Monthly*, December 1956, pp. 548-549

Expelled from the Labour Party, along with Michael Foot, in November 1954 for opposing nuclear defence policy. Readmitted in April 1955. Went on to become a founding member of CND in 1957.<sup>713</sup> Suspicions regarding Silverman's loyalties lingered within the PLP and he appeared on Gordon Walker's 1961 list of potential communists (see chapter four). The Security Service did not think he warranted further investigation however.<sup>714</sup>

- **Barnett Stross (Hanley)**

MP for Hanley from 1945 to 1950 and MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central from 1950 to 1966. Born in Poland to Jewish parents in 1899, family immigrated to Britain in 1902. Medical doctor prior to his parliamentary career. Close links with Czechoslovakia due to taking in Czech refugees following Nazi invasion in 1937.<sup>715</sup> Later became executive of the Anglo-Czech Friendship society and was highly involved in raising money for the town of Lidice, which was destroyed by the Nazis during the war due to its high Jewish population.<sup>716</sup> Appeared on Walker's 1961 list as a 'possible' communist, though not investigated further by the Service. Knighted in 1964. Posthumously named as a Czech agent by defector Josef Frolík in 1969.<sup>717</sup>

- **William Warbey (Luton)**

MP for Luton from 1945 to 1950. Lost his seat at the 1950 election. Re-elected as MP for Broxtowe following a by-election in 1953, serving until 1955. MP for Ashfield from 1955 to 1966. Strongly pro-Soviet, Warbey opposed the creation of NATO and co-authored (along with Konni Zilliacus) a pamphlet entitled *Stop the Coming War* in 1948 which was highly critical of British foreign policy.<sup>718</sup> Listed in Margaret Thornhill's notebook as having paid membership dues.<sup>719</sup> Included on

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<sup>713</sup> Ibid.

<sup>714</sup> Christopher Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, (Allen Lane, London, 2009), pp. 932-933

<sup>715</sup> Darren G. Lilleker, *Against the Cold War: The History and Political Traditions of Pro-Sovietism in the British Labour Party, 1945-1989*, (I.B. Tauris, London, 2004), p.123

<sup>716</sup> 'How Stoke-on-Trent helped Lidice recover from the Nazis', BBC News article, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2011, accessed via: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/stoke/hi/people\\_and\\_places/history/newsid\\_9418000/9418670.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/stoke/hi/people_and_places/history/newsid_9418000/9418670.stm)

<sup>717</sup> Lilleker, *Against the Cold War*, p. 123

<sup>718</sup> Stefan Berger & Norman LaPorte, *Friendly Enemies: Britain and the GDR, 1949-1990*, (Berghahn Books, New York, 2010), p. 34

<sup>719</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 412

Walker's 1961 list as a member of the CPGB, though not investigated further by MI5. Later wrote a strongly pro-communist biography of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>720</sup>

- **Geoffrey Bing (Hornchurch)**

See chapter one.

- **Stephen Swinger (Stafford)**

MP for Stafford from 1945 to 1950. Lost his seat at the 1950 election, re-elected as MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1951, retained position until his death in 1969. Member of the pro-Soviet 'Keep Left' group within the PLP. Suspected by Attlee of crypto-communism, who voiced his concerns directly to Percy Sillitoe in 1947.<sup>721</sup> Listed as a crypto-communist by Douglas Hyde in his 1950 autobiography *I Believed: The Autobiography of a Former British Communist*. Also included in Margaret Thornhill's notebook as having paid membership dues.<sup>722</sup> Subject of MI5 Personal File (unreleased).<sup>723</sup> Listed as a CPGB member on Walker's 1961 list. Subsequently investigated by the Security Service who concluded that Swinger had joined the Party in 1934, before leaving in 1940 and re-joining in 1945.<sup>724</sup> Believed to have left the CPGB permanently by 1951.

- **George Wigg (Dudley)**

MP for Dudley from 1945 to 1967. Joined the Army in 1918, serving in the Royal Tank Corps from 1919 to 1937. Re-joined in 1940 and served in the Army Educational Corps until 1946.<sup>725</sup> It is unclear why Wigg was included on Phillips' 1945 list other than the fact that he was good friends with several members of the 'Keep Left' group.<sup>726</sup> Appointed parliamentary private secretary to Emanuel Shinwell (Minister of Fuel and Power 1945-1947, Secretary of State for War

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<sup>720</sup> William Warbey, *Ho Chi Minh and the Struggle for Independent Vietnam*, (Merlin Press, London, 1972)

<sup>721</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 837

<sup>722</sup> Ibid, p. 412

<sup>723</sup> Serial 401a, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1952, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>724</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>725</sup> 'George Wigg', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31830>

<sup>726</sup> Ibid.

1947-1950, Minister of Defence 1950-1951) by Clement Attlee. Later close friend of Harold Wilson and closely involved in Labour plotting against Profumo in the early 1960s.<sup>727</sup> Paymaster-General from 1964 to 1967. Elevated to the House of Lords in 1967.

- **Herschel Austin (Stretford)**

MP for Stretford from 1945 to 1950. Austin was of Jewish Heritage and was mainly noted for opposition to Ernest Bevin, whom he personally disliked.<sup>728</sup> Authored a satirical pamphlet in 1948 entitled *The Importance of Being Ernest (Bevin)*.<sup>729</sup> Seems to have been included on Phillips' list for this reason. Left-wing, though little available evidence of ties to communism.

- **Geoffrey Cooper (Middlesbrough West)**

MP for Middlesbrough West from 1945 to 1951. RAF pilot during the Second World War and mentioned in despatches.<sup>730</sup> Reason for inclusion on Phillips' list unclear. Noted critic of the BBC, however further available information regarding Cooper is slight.<sup>731</sup>

- **Hadyn Davies (St Pancras South West)**

MP for St Pancras South West from 1945 to 1950. Journalist prior to parliamentary service. Reasons for inclusion on Phillips' list unclear. Only parliamentary activity of note was advocating for the creation of a Royal Commission on the Press in 1946.<sup>732</sup>

- **Ian Mikardo (Reading)**

MP for Reading from 1945 to 1950 and again from 1955-1959. MP for Reading South from 1950 to 1955. MP for successive Bethnal Green constituencies from

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<sup>727</sup> 'Sinister backbench MP played key role in downfall', *The Guardian*, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2006

<sup>728</sup> *Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History*, p. 42

<sup>729</sup> Lilliker, *Against the Cold War*, p. 120

<sup>730</sup> *Who Was Who 2016* as accessed via:

<http://www.ukwhoswho.com/view/article/oupww/whowaswho/U171817>

<sup>731</sup> Asa Briggs, *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom: Volume IV: Sound and Vision*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979), p. 272

<sup>732</sup> M. Moore, *The Origins of Modern Spin: Democratic Government and the Media in Britain, 1945-1951*, (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2006), p. 123



1964 to 1987. Left-wing MP of Jewish heritage. Involved with Poale Zion during the 1940s. Leading member of the 'Keep Left' group, though little available evidence to suggest close ties to communism.<sup>733</sup> Served as chairman of the national executive committee of the Labour Party from 1970 to 1971. Later campaign manager for Michael Foot during his leadership campaign in 1980.<sup>734</sup>

- **Julius Silverman (Birmingham Erdington)**

MP for Birmingham Erdington (under various descriptions due to boundary changes) from 1945 to 1983. Of Jewish heritage. Called to the bar in 1931, served as Birmingham City Councillor from 1943-1935. Believed by the Security Service to be a crypto-communist and subject of Personal File (unreleased).<sup>735</sup> Listed as member of the CPGB on Walker's 1961 list. Subsequently investigated by the Security Service, who concluded that 'He has for a long time, had extremely close relations with the Soviet Embassy, and may well be considered a useful source of Parliamentary information, if nothing more.'<sup>736</sup>

- **Charles George Percy Smith (Colchester)**

MP for Colchester from 1945-1950. General Secretary of the Post Office Engineering Union from 1953 to 1972. Identified by the Security Service as a crypto-communist within Geoffrey Bing's file.<sup>737</sup> Created a life peer in 1967 and served as Minister of State for Technology from 1969 to 1970.

- **Wilfrid Vernon (Dulwich)**

MP for Dulwich from 1945 to 1951. Active member of local communist group at Farnborough during the 1930s whilst employed at the Royal Aircraft Establishment. Prosecuted in 1937 under the Official Secrets Act for retaining secret documents.<sup>738</sup> Later admitted to spying for the Soviet Union whilst employed at Farnborough. Case was brought before Attlee by the Security Service

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<sup>733</sup> 'Ian Mikardo', *ODNB*, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52289?docPos=1>

<sup>734</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>735</sup> Serial 401a, 9<sup>th</sup> June 1952, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>736</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>737</sup> 'Attack on MI5', report by MI5, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

<sup>738</sup> See file TNA, KV 2/995

in 1948 who expressed ‘complete surprise’ that Vernon was a spy.<sup>739</sup> Unable to be prosecuted due to his status as an MP, subsequently interviewed by the Security Service again in 1952 in order to ‘augment their historical knowledge of Soviet espionage activities’.<sup>740</sup>

- **Ron Chamberlain (Norwood)**

MP for Norwood from 1945 to 1950. Secretary of the National Federation of Housing Societies prior to parliamentary service. Voted against joining NATO in 1949 however was not expelled from the Labour Party. Founding member of the Trotskyite ‘Socialist Fellowship’ group in 1949, which was later proscribed by the Labour Party in 1951.<sup>741</sup>

1945 intake Labour MPs not included on Phillips’ List, but noted as communist sympathisers by Douglas Hyde in 1950:

- **William Griffiths (Manchester Moss Side)**

MP for Manchester Moss Side from 1945 to 1950 and Manchester Exchange from 1950 to 1973. Listed as crypto-communist by Hyde, though believed to have left the Party by 1951.<sup>742</sup> Included on Walker’s 1961 list of possible CPGB members, though his case was not investigated further.<sup>743</sup> Noted pro-Zionist MP.<sup>744</sup>

- **Hugh Lester Hutchinson (Manchester Rusholme)**

MP for Manchester Rusholme from 1945 to 1950. Son of Mary Knight, one of the founding members of the CPGB. Hutchinson had been arrested in India in 1932

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<sup>739</sup> Daniel W.B. Lomas, ‘Labour Ministers, Intelligence and Domestic Anti-Communism, 1945-1951’, *Journal of Intelligence History*, Volume 12, Issue 2, 2013, p.118

<sup>740</sup> Andrew Roberts, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900*, (Hachette UK, London, 2010), ebook version, accessed via:

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=rQTgHvsUhyMC&pg=PT335&lpg=PT335&dq=Wilfrid+Vernon+MP&source=bl&ots=naP1GTEF6O&sig=POeINCxU-sRifw5KqPIQHvEj6W8&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKUewjJ54Tq8rbOAhXmLcAKHYd4DyQQ6AEIRzAG#v=onepage&q=Wilfrid%20Vernon%20MP&f=false>

<sup>741</sup> *Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy and the Origins of the EEC, 1952-1957*, ed. Ennio Di Nolfo, (Walter de Gruyter, Berlin, 1992), p. 314

<sup>742</sup> Security Service questionnaire re: Douglas Hyde’s testimony, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1951, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>743</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>744</sup> Martin Woolacott, *After Suez: Adrift in the American Century*, (I.B. Tauris, London, 2009), p. 112

whilst investigating arrests of communists there.<sup>745</sup> Listed by Hyde in *I Believed* as a crypto-communist in 1945 though was believed to have left the CPGB shortly after 1945.<sup>746</sup> Nevertheless, identified as a crypto-communist by the Security Service to Attlee in 1947.<sup>747</sup> Voted against joining NATO in 1949 and was subsequently expelled from the Labour Party as a result. Never returned to the Labour Party following the incident. Faded into obscurity following the loss of his seat at the 1950 general election.<sup>748</sup>

- **Harold Lever (Manchester Exchange)**

MP for Manchester Exchange from 1945 to 1950, Manchester Cheetham from 1950 to 1974 and Manchester Central from 1974 to 1979. Served as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster from 1974 to 1979 and subsequently elevated to the peerage. Named as a crypto-communist by Hyde, though believed to have left the CPGB by 1951.<sup>749</sup> His name did not reappear on Walker's 1961 list.

- **Arthur Lewis (Upton)**

MP for Upton from 1945 to 1950, for West Ham North from 1950 to 1974 and for Newham North West from 1974 to 83. Trade union official for the National Union of General and Municipal Workers from 1938 to 1948. Listed by Hyde as a crypto-communist and believed by MI5 to still be a party member in 1948.<sup>750</sup> Listed as a possible CPGB member on Walker's 1961 list, though not investigated further by the Security Service.<sup>751</sup> Served 38 years as a Labour MP before being deselected by his constituency party in 1983, who he denounced as '100 per cent Trotskyist, Militant Tendency, Communist and IRA supporters'.<sup>752</sup>

- **John Platts-Mills (Finsbury)**

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<sup>745</sup> Lilleker, *Against the Cold War*, p. 95

<sup>746</sup> Security Service questionnaire re: Douglas Hyde's testimony, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1951, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>747</sup> Serial 333a, 21<sup>st</sup> April 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

<sup>748</sup> Lilleker, *Against the Cold War*, p. 235

<sup>749</sup> Security Service questionnaire re: Douglas Hyde's testimony, 12<sup>th</sup> March 1951, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>750</sup> Ibid.

<sup>751</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>752</sup> Richard Heffernan & Mike Marqusee, *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory: Inside Kinnock's Labour Party*, (Verso, London, 1992), p. 18

MP for Finsbury from 1945 to 1950. Expelled from the Labour Party for pro-communist sympathies in 1948, though continued to sit as an independent until 1950. Called to the bar in 1933 and became enamoured with the Soviet Union during the 1930s. Close friends with Indian intellectual Krishna Menon, who was also suspected of covert links to the CPGB.<sup>753</sup> Infamous as a Stalin apologist during his time in the House of Commons.<sup>754</sup> Identified as a crypto-communist by the Security Service to Attlee in 1947.<sup>755</sup> Opposed the creation of NATO and called for Labour support of the Italian Communist Party, which led to his expulsion. Believed by Hyde to be a crypto-communist. Active in the British Peace Committee (British arm of the Soviet World Peace Council) as of 1950.<sup>756</sup> Attended Stalin's funeral in 1953. Later became a noted defence barrister who represented the Kray Twins and members of the Great Train Robbery gang.<sup>757</sup> Readmitted to the Labour Party in 1969, by which point his communist sympathies had mellowed.<sup>758</sup>

- **Leslie Solley (Thurrock)**

MP for Thurrock from 1945 to 1950. Barrister prior to his parliamentary service. Believed by Hyde to be a crypto-communist at the 1945 general election. Solley was a signatory to John Platts-Mills' petition in support of the Italian Communist Party and also voted against Britain joining NATO. Expelled from the Labour Party as a result of these transgressions and never re-joined.<sup>759</sup> Solley attempted to contest Thurrock as an independent candidate in 1950, however was defeated and subsequently retired from politics. Later served as vice-president of the Songwriters Guild of Great Britain.

- **Konni Zilliacus (Gateshead)**

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<sup>753</sup> 'John Platts-Mills', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76388>. Krishna Menon was also a subject of Security Service interest, particularly during his time as Indian High Commissioner in London, see files TNA, KV 2/2509 to 2/2514

<sup>754</sup> 'Obituary of John Platts-Mills', *The Telegraph*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2001

<sup>755</sup> Serial 333a, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

<sup>756</sup> MI5 telephone intercept, 12<sup>th</sup> December 1950, TNA, KV 2/3813

<sup>757</sup> 'John Platts-Mills', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/76388>

<sup>758</sup> 'Obituary of John Platts-Mills', *The Observer*, 27<sup>th</sup> October 2001

<sup>759</sup> Harry Harmer, *Longman Companion to the Labour Party*, (Routledge, London, 2014), p. 162

MP for Gateshead from 1945 to 1950 and MP for Manchester Gorton from 1955 to 1967. Worked within the League of Nations Secretariat prior to the outbreak of World War II. Noted left-winger, though not wholly pro-Soviet. Noted for his support of Tito over Stalin in 1948. However, Zilliacus did also travel to the Soviet Union on a number of occasions during his time as an MP and twice interviewed Stalin.<sup>760</sup> Listed by Douglas Hyde as a fellow-traveller, rather than crypto-communist. Appeared within Margaret Thornhill's notebook as having paid dues of some description to the Communist Party, which suggests that Zilliacus may have been a covert member of the CPGB.<sup>761</sup> Also included on Walker's 1961 list, though not investigated further by the Security Service. Voted against joining NATO and was eventually expelled from the Labour Party in 1949. Readmitted in 1952 and went on to become a founding member of CND in 1957.

#### 1945 intake Labour MPs independently identified as crypto-communists by the Security Service

- **Elizabeth 'Bessie' Braddock (Liverpool Exchange)**

MP for Liverpool Exchange from 1945 to 1970. Trade unionist in her early career, joined the Independent Labour Party in 1917 before moving to the CPGB in 1920. Ostensibly left the Communist Party in 1924 and joined the Labour Party.<sup>762</sup> Identified as a definite crypto-communist by the Security Service to Attlee in 1947.<sup>763</sup> Elected to the Labour National Executive Committee in 1947, serving until 1969. Split from the left-wing of the Labour Party over disagreements regarding the Korean War (Braddock supported the government's position). Moved steadily rightwards from 1950 onwards, leading to an attempt by her local Party to deselect her in 1955. The attempt failed and Braddock increased her

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<sup>760</sup> 'Konni Zilliacus', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/55670>

<sup>761</sup> Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 412

<sup>762</sup> 'Elizabeth Braddock', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37214?docPos=1>

<sup>763</sup> Serial 333a, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

majority to 7,186.<sup>764</sup> Supported attempts by Gaitskell and Morrison to expel Bevan in 1955. Fierce critic of communism later in life.<sup>765</sup> Revered by the people of Liverpool, now immortalised as a statue at Lime Street Station.

- **Donald Bruce (Portsmouth North)**

MP for Portsmouth North from 1945 to 1950. Member of the Independent Labour Party during the early 1930s, before joining Labour in 1935. Officer in the Royal Signals during World War Two. Mentioned in dispatches for his conduct at the Normandy landings before being recruited for Eisenhower's intelligence staff.<sup>766</sup> Became close to Aneurin Bevan following accession to the House of Commons and appointed Bevan's parliamentary private secretary in late 1945. Listed as a crypto-communist by MI5 within Geoffrey Bing's file.<sup>767</sup> Lost his seat by 945 votes in the 1950 general election, however remained active in Labour politics as an ordinary member. Appointed a life peer by Harold Wilson in 1974. Served as an MEP from 1972 to 1979, became a lifelong critic of the EU thereafter.

- **Leah Manning (Epping)**

MP for Islington East from February to October 1931, MP for Epping from 1945 to 1950. Studied as a teacher at Homerton Training College Cambridge, during which time she joined the Independent Labour Party.<sup>768</sup> Served on the national executive committee of the National Union of Teachers in the 1920s. Also served on the Labour NEC from 1930 to 1931. Organised the evacuation of circa 4,000 children from Bilbao in 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. Identified as a definite crypto-communist by the Security Service to Attlee in 1947.<sup>769</sup> Appointed as a Dame of the British Empire in 1966, a series of seminar rooms at Homerton College, Cambridge are named in her memory.

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<sup>764</sup> Ben D. Rees, *A Portrait of Battling Bessie*, (Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 2011), pp. 91-92

<sup>765</sup> See John Braddock & Bessie Braddock, *The Braddocks*, (London, Macdonald, 1963)

<sup>766</sup> 'Donald Bruce', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/95748?docPos=1>

<sup>767</sup> 'Attack on MI5', report by MI5, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

<sup>768</sup> 'Leah Manning', *ODNB*, accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45463?docPos=1>

<sup>769</sup> Serial 333a, 21<sup>st</sup> May 1947, TNA, KV 2/3812

Labour Party MPs included on Gordon Walker's 1961 list of suspected crypto-communists and subsequently investigated by the Security Service.<sup>770</sup>

- **Frank Allaun (Salford East)**

MP for Salford East from 1955 to 1983. Joined the CPGB in 1940 as a committed pacifist.<sup>771</sup> Joined the Labour Party in 1945 and ran for the Moss Side seat in 1951, though was defeated. Believed by MI5 to have 'Trotskyist tendencies', though not an outright crypto-communist.<sup>772</sup> Highly involved in the CND and helped organise the first Aldermaston March. Served on the Labour NEC from 1967 to 1983, including as Chair from 1978-1979. Refused to be appointed to the House of Lords on retirement.

- **John Baird (Wolverhampton North East)**

MP for Wolverhampton East/North East from 1945 to 1964. Practicing dentist prior to his parliamentary career. According to available records, never investigated by the Service during the Attlee administration. Soviet and Maoist sympathiser, Baird visited both countries during his time as an MP.<sup>773</sup> Noted by MI5 as a Trotskyist rather than a crypto-communist.<sup>774</sup> Assisted the Revolutionary Socialist League (better known as Militant Tendency) during its early years.<sup>775</sup>

- **Harold Davies (Leek)**

MP for Leek from 1945 to 1970. Associated with the 'Keep Left' group during the Attlee years. However, not identified in any available MI5 files from that period as a crypto-communist. Believed by MI5 to never have been a member of the CPGB though 'in contact with leading members of the Party'.<sup>776</sup> Notation next to Davies' name on Walker's list reads 'not on IRD list', indicating that the IRD were maintaining their own separate record of suspected crypto-communists.<sup>777</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> Walker's list runs to twenty-five names, sixteen of whom were believed to be definite members on the CPGB by PLP leadership and another nine 'possibles'. For the sake of brevity this appendix lists only those directly investigated by MI5.

<sup>771</sup> 'Frank Allaun', *ODNB*, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/77372>

<sup>772</sup> Footnote 90, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>773</sup> 'Obituary of John Baird', *The Times*, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1965

<sup>774</sup> Footnote 90, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>775</sup> John Callaghan, *The Far Left in British Politics*, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1987), p. 192

<sup>776</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>777</sup> Said list has yet to be made publically available.

Parliamentary Private Secretary to Harold Wilson from 1967 to 1970. Appointed as a Privy Councillor in 1969. Elevated to the House of Lords as a life peer in 1970.

- **Stephen Owen Davies (Merthyr Tydfil)**

MP for Merthyr/Merthyr Tydfil from 1934 to 1972. Trade union leader for the South Wales Miners' Federation prior to his parliamentary career. Noted as an apologist for the Soviet Union and had visited the country in 1922 as a union delegate.<sup>778</sup> Despite this was not investigated as a suspected crypto during the Attlee years. MI5 surveillance efforts in 1961 showed that 'if he was not of the Party, he was very close to it indeed'.<sup>779</sup> Finally split from the Labour Party in 1966 following the Aberfan disaster (during which a coal tip collapsed on top of a school, killing 116 children) as a result of the National Coal Board's refusal to fully compensate the Welsh mining town for the costs of the subsequent rebuilding efforts. Ran as an independent MP in the 1970 election and won over his official Labour rival by more than 7,000 votes.<sup>780</sup>

- **Richard Kelley (Don Valley)**

MP for Don Valley from 1959 to 1979. Mining union official prior to parliamentary career. NUM sponsored MP, believed by MI5 to have been a CPGB member from 1932 to 1955. Deemed to be a low threat as 'The CPGB have, and quite rightly, a low opinion of his intelligence'. Denounced by the Social Democratic Alliance (what went on to become the Social Democratic Party) for communist associations in 1976.<sup>781</sup>

- **John Mendelson (Penistone)**

MP for Penistone from 1959 to 1978. Trade union official prior to parliamentary career. Service investigation found that Mendelson was a CPGB member during

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<sup>778</sup> ODNB, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47339>

<sup>779</sup> Footnote 90, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>780</sup> 'Stephen Owen Davies', ODNB, as accessed via: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/47339>

<sup>781</sup> 'Labour MPs "Broke Party Rules"', *The Times*, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1976



the 1940s, however the Party erroneously believed him to be a MI5 penetration agent. Noted to have met with Czech intelligence in 1960, but no available evidence to suggest that he acted as an agent.<sup>782</sup> Minor backbench MP for entirety of parliamentary career.

- **Leslie Plummer (Deptford)**

MP for Deptford from 1951 to 1963. Journalist during the 1920s through late 1940s. Appointed chairman of the ill-fated Tanganyika groundnut scheme in 1947 (which was intended to cultivate vast tracts of modern-day Tanzania for peanut crops) and knighted in 1949 before it was clear that the project was doomed to failure. Not believed to be a crypto-communist by the Security Service though ‘the CPGB think well of his activities’.<sup>783</sup>

- **Thomas Swain (Derbyshire North East)**

MP for Derbyshire North East from 1959 to 1979. Mining union official prior to parliamentary career. F Branch reports indicated that Swain made donations to the CPGB and passed minutes from NUM executive committee meetings to communist leadership.<sup>784</sup> Minor backbench MP for entirety of parliamentary career.

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<sup>782</sup> Footnote 90, Andrew, *Defence of the Realm*, p. 932

<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

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